*International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 2013, Volume 25, Number 3, 358-368
http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/ ISSN 1812-9129

# Writing Children's Books in Sociology Class: An Innovative Approach to Teaching Social Problems to Undergraduate Students

James N. Maples
*The University of Tennessee at Martin*

William V. Taylor
*The University of Tennessee at Knoxville*

In this instructional article, we describe a non-traditional course assignment in which we ask students in our social problems courses to write, illustrate, and present a children's book about a social problem as part of the process of learning. Over the course of the semester, students utilize guided handouts to create a children's book exploring and explaining a social problem of their choice. Students are asked to explain the social problem, conduct basic research, apply sociological material, and explore possible solutions. Along the way, our students learn to apply the sociological imagination and improve their understanding of how larger social phenomena shape the decisions of individuals. Students also acquire basic research skills and methodological knowledge that follows them throughout their academic career. In our experiences, we find that this fresh, intriguing assignment helps students overcome common barriers to learning about sociology, allows them to invest in their work, and encourages them to employ their own unique skills to create both a quality project and an educational memory.

Survey courses on social problems often fulfill humanities requirements in many majors because these courses help provide students with a greater perception of our shared society. This makes social problems courses a large (but welcomed) teaching burden for most sociology programs. At the heart of both our discipline and the study of social problems is a desire to instill in students a lasting impression of the *sociological imagination*: an understanding of how social phenomena shape the lives of individuals (Mills, 1959). Yet, teaching this concept to non-sociology majors on a brief timeline while overcoming student cognitive dissonance about social issues is a lofty task.

To this end, we created an innovative, non-traditional course project designed to expose undergraduate students of any major to both the sociological imagination and social problems by completing a relatively innocuous assignment: writing a children's book. Over the course of the entire semester, students write, design, and present to the class a children's book exploring a single social problem. Students select a social problem early in the semester and are guided through the project using handouts that help them learn research skills while writing their book. This unique, fresh assignment provides an opportunity for students to engage with the learning process academically, creatively, imaginatively, and personally. Additionally, our project can easily be adapted to other courses and other disciplines, and therefore may also be useful to non-sociology instructors.

In this teaching note, we outline our goals and objectives, implementation plan, and outcomes employing this project in our own classes. At the conclusion of the semester, we find that this project has instilled a lasting sense of the sociological imagination in the student mind. Our students leave the course with a deeper appreciation and understanding of social problems in our shared society, accompanied by a fond memory of the time they wrote a children's book in, of all places, a college classroom.

## Goals and Objectives

The greater purpose of this project is to create a class assignment capable of helping undergraduates gain a meaningful understanding of social problems and the sociological imagination. In our experience, many students are unwilling to bite into either idea wholeheartedly. Instead, students are, quite expectedly, resistant to the idea that sociological phenomena (e.g., social problems) somehow explain individual decisions (Baker & Jones, 1981; Fuller, 1938; Mills, 1959; Oxoby, 2004). Students find themselves uncomfortable with the idea that invisible forces shape their lives without their knowledge.

Many students taking social problems courses are also not sociology majors, meaning that they are somewhat less equipped to comprehend the gravity and prevalence of social problems and of the social construction and claimsmaking processes. Hence, we must also provide a reason for non-sociology students to get excited about sociological research and themes. Such a project would allow non-majors (especially artists and writers) to imbue their skills into a sociological class project (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). Moreover, our experience tells us that spreading this excitement is part and parcel with recruiting new majors and invigorating the student mind.

With these issues at heart, we created our children's book assignment, a project intended to help students understand social problems, how social problems impact individuals, and how social problems might be resolved. Our objectives for this assignment are that the student will understand the construction of

social problems, gain experience utilizing the sociological imagination in their research, and be able to disseminate their findings to their peers at the end of the semester. Students will also learn rudimentary skills in academic research, including accessing academic services such as JSTOR, discerning between biased and unbiased research, simplifying complex concepts, and summarizing and discussing academic articles. Although initially designed for sociology courses, instructors in other disciplines may easily adapt the project to their courses by adjusting the specific goals and objectives.

## Implementation

This assignment is spread across four handouts. The handouts are included in the Appendix. Each handout builds upon the previous handout, culminating in the submission of the final copy of the student's book. The idea is that each handout helps the student complete one step in the process: identify a social problem, research the social problem, simplify the social problem to its basic claims through the sociological imagination, and then design and create their book.

This assignment is very flexible in terms of its timeline, allowing the instructor to strategically deploy the handouts in order to reinforce what is being taught in class. For example, assigning the first handout relatively soon after discussing the working definition of a social problem allows the student to think about the meaning of social problems as they go about selecting one for their class project. As the role of claimsmakers and advocates in defining social problems becomes clearer to the student in lecture, handout two reinforces this possibility by asking the student to reconsider how the social problem they selected is the product of framing. In the third handout, we ask students to dig deeper into their chosen social problem by looking at the relationship between history and biography, and then by attempting to simplify their social problem and identify realistic solutions. Assigning the final handout with about 25% of the semester remaining allows students time to create their final books for submission and reflect on what they have learned. The semester culminates in the final presentation, in which students read their book to the entire class and answers questions from the class.

Class size and semester duration present certain challenges. The lengthy nature of this project poses a problem for short summer terms. Over the course of a full semester, instructors can introduce basic sociological concepts before asking students to begin a handout. For summer courses, teachers need to begin the project quite early. However, instructors may feel forced to introduce the project before students have much of a sense of what sociology is all about. If the project is implemented too early, problems may manifest in students' difficulty in formulating appropriate, manageable theses. In our experience, teaching full semester classes also present a paradox. Although a full semester allows more time for teachers to introduce concepts and respond to students' work, full semester classes tend to be much larger. Crowded classes make individual attention much more challenging (Van Herk, 2008). For large classes, we have found it useful to host workshops during which students discuss ideas with each other and the instructor. Workshops activities might include brainstorming ideas, sharing difficulties, or exploring selected published children's books.

We also find it useful to plan and provide one or two additional roundtable events over the course of the semester where students may come to share their early drafts with other students and the instructor and receive recommendations. Roundtables increase interaction between the roles of instructor and student (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). During these discussions, we emphasize collaborative ways of producing knowledge that place value on student experiences and collective processes, such as encouraging ourselves to treat our students as co-investigators (Freire, 1970). As part of these workshops, the instructor can also provide examples of children's books for students to read and discuss in groups. We encourage students to reconsider the books by critically examining the authors' use of narrative techniques, language, and imagery to convey emotion, meaning, and message. As part of these events, instructors might ask library staff or early childhood educators to bring books and share their expertise with students while encouraging students to think about stories they are familiar with and bring books from home.

Grading on this assignment presents a challenge and can be adjusted to course needs. The instructor must keep in mind that this is a relatively time-intensive assignment and be sure to grade it as such (Narter, 2005). Our suggested grading rubric for the final book is included in the Appendix. In our courses, the final book is worth the equivalent of one exam. However, this can be adjusted to meet the instructor's course plan. We strongly suggest providing the grading rubric for the final book when initially discussing the project with the class and again with the last handout so students know what is expected of them and have a clear understanding of how the teacher will evaluate their project. Additionally, we suggest that each handout should be worth points (e.g., 20 points) to ensure that students complete the early assignments. Otherwise, the project loses its impact as the handouts are designed to build up to the final book.

Finally, we strongly feel that the project can easily be adapted into other disciplines and other courses. We

constructed the project around a central goal that can be adjusted to other classroom needs. We believe the key to adapting this project to other disciplines is thinking about a singular classroom goal. For example, geography instructors might utilize the project to help students understand how our environment shapes human life and vice versa. English instructors could use this project as a creative writing assignment that utilizes concepts discussed in class. Biology instructors might use this project to help students explore class concepts (e.g., photosynthesis, cell division) by creating books that explain the concept at a simple, yet precise, level. Further, many of the outcomes already present in this project (such as the research elements of handout two and the simplification process in handout three) address desired outcomes common to education at all levels. We encourage authors considering adapting this project to their individual classrooms to contact us so we may collectively discuss improving this project as a pedagogical tool.

**Handout One: Selecting a Social Problem**

The first handout introduces the student to the basics of the project and assigns the task of identifying a single social problem to examine over the course of the semester. Early in the semester, we briefly introduce students to an array of social problems in readings and lecture. However, it is useful to provide an additional list of other social problems not yet mentioned in class.

Students are also encouraged to identify other social problems they may be interested in studying due to their own backgrounds. For example, several students from rural areas have expressed a desire to examine methamphetamine production and abuse in this project. We find that selecting a social problem of particular interest helps invest the student in the project.

After selecting a social problem, students are asked in the handout to explain the basics of the social problem in a brief paragraph: who the problem affects, where the problem occurs, how or when the problem first appeared (if possible), what allows the problem to continue, and how our society tentatively might fix the problem. Again, this first step is designed to help the student find a social problem and provide a basic summary of the problem. This creates a starting point for the rest of the project.

Students bring their work on the first assignment to class for discussion, providing an opportune time for the instructor to guide or alter the student's selected social problem. Most student topics need to be pared down to a more-defined issue in order to guard against overwhelmingly broad topics that are challenging to research and might lead to meaningless generalizations. We encourage students to formulate full thesis statements about their social problem that are precise, explicit, and focused.

When students are asked to state their social problem, too often answers sound vague: a major social problem facing the world today is [fill in the blank] (e.g., abortion, hunger, poverty, homelessness). The following is an example of a poor thesis statement that has previously been submitted by a student: "Alcohol is a major social problem." We ask students to be more precise. After all, alcohol itself is not a problem. After some prompting and guidance, the student returned with the following: "Addiction to alcohol is a major social problem in the United States." Still, we think the statement is vague and unclear. We might ask what specific aspect of addiction constitutes the social element of a social problem? To what extent is this a medical issue related to biology, chemistry, and physical dependence? To what extent is this a psychological and individual trouble? Encouraging students to use their sociological imaginations, we might prompt students to think about the relationship between corporate marketing and alcoholism. How do we see extreme alcohol consumption valorized in popular youth culture? Or, what groups suffer disproportionately from the effects of addiction and violence? Is this a gendered, racialized, or class issue? Here is clearer formulation of the above thesis: "Corporate marketing of alcohol to youth contributes to alcohol abuse among college students and is tied to violent and risky behaviors on US campuses." For our budding macro-level social theorists, we encouraged narrowing, focusing, and refocusing the scope of the problem. By formulating a specific and explicitly sociological question, students have an easier time finding research and avoiding the trap of explaining the problem in generalized, individualistic, or psychological terms.

We similarly find that students sometimes select phenomena that are only social problems to those making claims defining it as a social problem. Rather than asking students to pick another issue, we encourage allowing the student to complete the project using this topic. In later handouts, and especially at the end of the project, we ask students to reconsider their social problem and reflect on how the social problem is perhaps just a social construction by an individual or group. This often leads to an important teachable moment for the student that sticks with them.

**Handout Two: Researching Your Social Problem**

The purpose of the second handout is to guide students in researching their social problem and in discerning between reputable and disreputable sources of information. As instructors, we find that many freshmen have never been taught how to distinguish between academic sources and non-academic sources,

how to research a basic idea, or even where to begin a research project. Hence, in the second assignment, we guide our students in conducting a basic exploration of their selected social problem.

In the assignment, we ask students to find and read an academic article relevant to their social problem. When assigning this handout, we demonstrate in class how to look up social problems using databases such as JSTOR. Instructors can also provide a link on Blackboard or similar online course portals to help students take that first step. Once students find and read an article relevant to their social issue, we ask them to summarize the findings of the article. We also ask them to identify how the article's author defines the social problem, and to share any new ideas students learned about their selected social problem. Finally, we ask students to reconsider whether their social problem is, indeed, still a genuine social problem.

**Handout Three: Simplifying a Social Problem**

The purpose of the third handout is to help students simplify their social problem while utilizing the sociological imagination. We ask our students to learn to think about the core of their selected social problem by asking them to think about how they might explain this issue to a young child. We ask students to consider the language and wording they would use to describe the problem, and how they would explain how this social problem impacts individuals. We encourage students to be creative here, using symbolic language in lieu of discussing topics like violence. For example, characters in the children's book may shout instead of being involved in physical violence.

Next, we ask students to engage their sociological imagination by thinking about the relationship between individual decisions and the greater social phenomena surrounding and shaping those decisions (Mills, 1959). We ask students to reconsider how the actions and decisions of characters in their story might be guided by greater sociological phenomena, such as culture or socialization. We ask students to implement the sociological imagination into the story line by exploring how individual decisions are framed by history. In the earliest versions of this project, we found that students (perhaps not surprisingly) often reverted to blaming individuals for social problems. We reconsidered our project and added this additional element to this handout designed specifically to counteract this tendency.

The theory guiding this handout stems from our belief that sociological knowledge can (and should) be shared through different mediums. In this exercise we highlight the communicative power of story. Universally, stories describe the resolution of problems. Conflict fuels compelling narratives. At the most basic level, stories consist of three components: complication, crisis, and resolution. This format fits well with the assignment. Sociologists, social psychologists, and psychologists have documented the many ways in which stories and compelling narratives are bound up in the way we understand ourselves and our world (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Wuthnow, 2006; Zerubavel, 1997). In fact, researchers have found that fiction is actually a more persuasive form of communication compared to non-fiction that is specifically designed to persuade through argument and evidence (Green & Donahue, 2009; Gottschall, 2012).

In this handout, we also ask the students to submit a draft copy of their children's book. We include the bare basics of what the final book should look like in handout three to help students begin thinking about the conclusion of the project. We set aside time at the end of class on the date the assignment is due to allow students to read their basic draft to two or three (or even small groups of) other students and discuss their work. We find this helps students prepare for the final process of finishing and presenting their book. Many students also begin to discuss what the final book will look like and share ideas with other students, making the final handout even more successful. Other students make major adjustments to their drafts having read it aloud and heard other examples.

Students often begin asking very specific questions about the writing process in handout three. One common question is what age group the children's book should address. We remain flexible on this issue and encourage students to pick a level that they feel is appropriate for their book. However, we also encourage students to address younger audiences rather than pre-teens and teens. In a few instances where students have selected older age groups, the books typically are much longer and require more work from the student. Length allows more room to discuss the social problem at hand, but it also makes simplifying the social problem slightly more difficult.

Another interesting question is whether the book should be fiction or non-fiction. We suggest encouraging students to do either. Most students default to writing a fiction book, but several students have incorporated themselves or their families into the books in a non-fiction formation with much success. Other students have utilized real-life encounters with social problems (e.g., the death of a family member due to health inequality) as the foundation for the plot. We find that students writing a non-fiction book are typically highly invested in the project.

**Handout Four: Finishing and Presenting the Children's Book**

The purpose of the final handout is to help students prepare their final book. In essence, the student has been working up to this moment across the entire

semester; now they only need a little guidance in creating the final product. This handout includes the final requirements for the book and outlines our expectations for the final book the student will submit. In this handout, we again provide the grade rubric for the final text (see Appendix).

We require our students to include eight to 12 pages of text in the book, not including the front and back cover. We ask that each page have no more than a few sentences to help keep the point of each page very clear. Students are expected to utilize each page to a particular purpose. Within the book, students are required to introduce their problem to the reader, explain how the problem impacts society, how the problem shapes the lives of individuals, and offer some kind of solution to their social problem. We ask that each page must be illustrated in some way. We also require that the student include a cover page for the book that includes the book title and the student's name. We ask the student to include a biographical statement about the author on the inside cover to help further invest the student in the project.

Students have shown great ingenuity in illustrating their books in our experiences. For example, we regularly have students with artistic flair submitting amazingly illustrated books. However, other students have utilized printed media (e.g., magazines or images) to create their illustrations to great effect. Still others have utilized crayons to create books from a child's perspective. Students also often personalize the book, placing their picture in the author's statement, using family members as characters, or even using family pictures inside the book. Other students include reviews of the book on the back cover, and some have even included bar codes and ISBNs.

At the end of the semester, we schedule a day for students to present their book to the class. Students simply sit on a stool before the class (just like in Kindergarten, right?) and read their book to the class. In especially large classroom situations, instructors may want to consider scheduling multiple days or have students present to smaller groups of students so that the entire class may complete this requirement in one day. Reading the book to the class allows other students to reflect on how other students approached the assignment. Also, it allows students to ask the author questions about the social problem and the solution they recommended. This provides an excellent opportunity to continue the discussion about the difficulty in fixing social problems in our society.

Instructors should also participate in asking questions. For example, we often ask our students if they feel the topic they selected is really a social problem, or if it is, instead, something that has been falsely presented as a social problem by claimsmakers. Many students find this question useful and demonstrate knowledge of class material in defending (or decrying) their selected topic. It also provides a great moment (and lasting memory) of the last days in this class and the conclusion of the project.

## Outcomes

Overall, this project functions as a useful pedagogical device that achieves positive outcomes. Handouts one and two represent more or less traditional ways of learning about social problems. These handouts make students think in a more focused way about a social issue, teach them to formulate a thesis, equip them with basic tools for reviewing scholarly works, and encourage critical engagement with sociological research. Handouts three and four require students to apply their sociological understanding by creating a children's book that communicates their problem through story and image while also employing their sociological imagination. Collectively, the project requires students to take ownership of the social problem. The project values self-investment, creativity, imagination, and communicative ability. Ultimately, our classes are aimed at planting sociological perspectives with hopes they will take root (Mills, 1959). Importantly, we believe this project helps achieve this end by *occupying* students' minds on many levels.

The non-traditional nature of this project challenges normative assumptions about what a sociology class should be, and we find our students take notice. We have asked students to share their thoughts about the project after the semester concludes. Our general impression is that, although a few students have been resistant, most students have a positive experience. One student was pleased to be able to exhibit her creative skills: "I enjoy doing crafts, so this project was right up my alley." Another student who submitted a phenomenal book shared his positive experience despite being artistically-challenged:

> I had a blast putting it together, and it's good to know my rudimentary drawing skills can get something across (oh yeah, that wasn't stylized art, that was me trying my darnedest). . . . I had a wonderful time in your class this semester. It definitely cemented my decision to pursue sociology.

Another common response had to do with students' excitement over being able to share their books with siblings, nieces, and nephews: "This might sound weird but my mother would like my children's book for my little brother."

Many students found the project a welcome alternative to more standard term papers. These positive responses suggest that this project succeeds in engaging students' minds on different levels and students enjoy having creative and imaginative outlets to share what they have learned. Still others find themselves so personally invested in the final books that they are unwilling to submit their final books for grading simply because they want to keep them as treasured objects. In this (increasingly common) instance, we ask the student to make a digital copy of the book for grading and allow the student to keep the original.

However, some students expressed frustration. Some resistance stems from the challenging and inherently subversive nature of the discipline (Giddens, 2010). Asking students to think sociologically, to call into question cherished values, and to critically examine their assumptions is—at the very least—discomforting for some. The following quote sums of some legitimate concerns from a student. The student may be reacting, in part, to receiving a lower grade than he had wished for but his frustration and recommendations are reasonable:

> There should be more than one option for the final project considering it is such a major part of the grade. It would be different if so many points relied on a paper because that is standard and not out of the norm, but to only give one option and have it be such a creative thing, I feel like some people cannot accurately portray their understanding of the material. After all, this is not a creative writing class and in my opinion I would have received a better grade on the project if I was a better creative writer. I am just kind of frustrated with how the project ended up because I had a subject that was the farthest from being meant for a children's book and despite a good amount of brainstorming and my best efforts, it's obvious I did not come up with a good way to portray the social problem.

He touches on several relevant challenges. First, explaining the purpose and theory behind this assignment is important. The student rightly points out that this is not a creative writing class. For whatever reason, he has not understood—or does not accept as legitimate—the theory guiding this project meant to challenge traditional assessments that reward narrow, specific academic skill sets. It seems reasonable to be frustrated by the project. It is a challenging assignment. However, that does not mean educators should shy away from alternative classroom assignments. It is intentionally challenging. Second, assigning grades for this project presents problems. We would point out that assigning grades based on multiple choice test performance is also problematic! For most instructors, grading students is an institutional requirement. Although some subjectivity is unavoidable, using a rubric helps standardize the grading. Third, there is also the question of how much to make the assignment worth. The total number of points must be balanced with the expectation that students put a great deal of time and work into the project and should be reflected in the grading process. Since the project is so different from normal assignments, instructors must be both patient and diligent in outlining their expectations. Again, the rubric helps students understand how they will be evaluated and helps teachers establish consistency with grading.

In this project, we find that we successfully engage our students by combining traditional approaches to learning with our creative, non-traditional assignment. Many students are attached to their projects and finish the semester with something they want to share with others. Producing a good book usually involves intellectual, imaginative, and even emotional investment on the part of students. The problems they investigate and the stories they tell *occupy their minds* on many levels. The process forces them beyond simple exercise in memory or intellectual analysis. We ask students to demonstrate sociological understanding and apply that knowledge in such a way that shared, communicative, and creative. Our evidence shows that it works.

We look forward to improving this project as it continues to evolve. We hope that others will be able to build on our experiences to make this project their own or to seek out other creative educational opportunities to share with students. We are especially hopeful that the project will branch beyond the sociology classroom and into other fields, since instructors from a wide range of disciplines can adapt this children's book project to meet the needs of their areas of teaching.

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JAMES N. MAPLES is an assistant professor of sociology at The University of Tennessee at Martin where he currently teaches courses on urban and community sociology, stratification and inequality, general sociology, and social problems and social justice. In his research agenda, he examines the causes and effects of spatial concentrations of similar jobs, including work on US ethnic niches and historic mountain cemetery destruction by mountain top removal activity in West Virginia. He received his PhD from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2012. He may be contacted at jmaple11@utm.edu.

WILLIAM V. TAYLOR is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He teaches introductory courses in sociology and social justice as well as upper level courses in political sociology. His work has been published in *Crime, Law, and Social Change.* He recently completed a master's thesis that examines international evangelical short-term mission trips and participants' responses to poverty. Forthcoming publications include work in the fields of pedagogy and environmental sociology. Currently he is researching tourism as an economic development strategy, the commodification of land and culture, and the social and environmental impacts on southern Appalachia.

Appendix
Assignment Handouts

**Sociology ### Class Project Handout**
**Assignment #1**
**[INSERT SEMESTER AND YEAR[**

This assignment is due on [INSERT DATE HERE]

**First assignment: Select a social problem (Due on [INSERT DATE HERE])**
First, you need to select a social problem. There are many, many social problems for you to consider using. Your textbook is an endless source of social problems. I will also post a list on Blackboard. A brief search of the Internet or the textbook will provide additional options. I'm also here to offer suggestions if you need help selecting a problem and answer questions you may have. I encourage students to follow a few criteria when selecting a social problem:

A. Select a social problem that interests you. You will be working on this issue all semester; don't select something that you aren't interested in studying.

B. Consider selecting a problem meaningful to your life. For example, if you come from a rural area that is coping with methamphetamine usage, researching this social problem might have special meaning to you. However, remember that you will be working on this subject all semester: don't select something that is too emotional to deal with for this assignment.

C. Select a social problem with at least some existing research. A quick search of the university's library catalogue will tell if this may be an issue.

D. Think about examining your social problem very specifically. If I selected *gangs* for this assignment, I could talk about gangs in general, but selecting particular gang in a particular area and thinking about a specific problem related to that gang would be more beneficial to your project.

**What you will be turning in to me on Blackboard:**
Once you have found a social problem that interests you, do some basic research for class on the Internet or in the library. Write up a paragraph (the bare minimum is 7-9 sentences) answering these questions about your social problem:

1. **What** social problem did you select?
2. **Where** does this problem occur?
3. **Who** is affected by this problem?
4. **How** did this problem develop and (if possible) when did it first appear?
5. **What** are some of the situations that allow this problem to continue?
6. **What** might a socially just solution to this problem look like?

Remember, I am here to help guide your project and answer questions as they appear.

**Sociology ### Class Project Handout**
**Assignment #2**
**[INSERT SEMESTER AND YEAR]**

This assignment is due on [INSERT DATE HERE]

Now that you have a social problem selected, you need to learn more about it. Your assignment this time is to find an *academic* article/book/source on your topic (hereinafter, source). I specify academic here because we need something that is less likely to be biased. Examples of biased articles include an article on a media website, an enthusiast hobby page, or group-sponsored website. As discussed in class, many sources construct claims that

become purported social problems. Don't forget the power of vested interests, values, and claimsmaking in the creation of pseudo-sources. We want real information from reliable academic sources.

1. **Finding a source:** For most, a visit to the library catalog will provide multiple academic sources. As demonstrated in class, students can also utilize JSTOR and Web of Knowledge. Links to both are available on the course Blackboard site. If this search does not help you, consider using Google Scholar. Please note that Wikipedia is NOT an academic source, as it is frequently wrong. If you have problems with this part of the assignment, let me know. I can help. Librarians are also of great assistance.

2. Once you find a source, download it or check it out. **READ IT!** Make notes on what
the source tells you about your social problem. Reflect on how this source helps you think about your social problem.

3. **Summarize** your findings for the class. Answer these questions and submit them to me on Blackboard by pasting the text into the assignment submission box. I expect it takes at least 3-6 sentences to answer each question, so don't think that one line answers are sufficient or that they will earn you full credit on this assignment.

A. In a few sentences, tell me what this source says about your problem.
B. How does your source research this problem?
C. Who defines the problem as a problem in your source?
D. Do you see any social institutions (church, government, schools, media, family, and education) that might shape your problem? If not, what are some that might?
E. Do you see any claimsmaking, values, or vested interests that might similarly shape your problem? If not, what are some that might?
F. How might *power* form a barrier to solving your social problem?
G. What new things did you learn from this source about your problem?
H. Do you still think your problem is, in fact, a social problem? Why?

Don't forget to include a citation for your source. The citation format should follow whatever form your discipline uses. If you don't know what format to use, ask me or your discipline advisor. I am here to answer your questions.

**Sociology ### Class Project Handout**
**Assignment #3**
**[INSERT SEMESTER AND YEAR]**

This assignment is due on [INSERT DATE HERE]

Armed with the knowledge you have gleaned from the previous two handouts and researching your social problem, the time has come to begin writing your children's book. For this assignment, you will write a draft of your children's book. Your draft is due [INSERT DATE HERE] on Blackboard by midnight. You must also bring a printed copy to class on [INSERT DATE HERE].

**What exactly must I turn in for this assignment?**
You will submit a text-only draft of your children's book.

**How do I submit this assignment?**
Unlike previous assignments, you will submit this assignment in two ways. First, have a printed copy of your draft with you in class on [INSERT DATE HERE]. You will discuss your draft in small groups in class to help you revise your draft. You must submit a copy of your draft on Blackboard by midnight by midnight on [INSERT DATE HERE]. It does not have to be a revised version of your draft.

**What is all the stuff on the next page about?**
The following steps will help you complete the assignment by walking you through the process and learning more about the requirements of the final book. Looking ahead, assignment #4 will provide a detailed explanation of the requirements of the final book.

**Working on your draft:**

**Step one: thinking about your draft**
Start working on your draft by asking yourself, "How would I explain my social problem to a child?" If you have young family members, think about how you might explain your social problem to them (please don't actually try this at home). Alternatively, think about your own childhood and how you would have liked someone to explain your social problem to you. Think back to children's books you have read and how they talk about issues like manners, playing with other kids, and so forth. Think also about telling a story about your social problem. You may want to create characters that tell the story or give examples in the story or have the book narrated by an invisible character. Think also about how your characters experience your social problem and how it impacts their lives as well as others in society.

As you think about your draft, think about words that you use that a child might not understand. For example, *deviance* or *culture* or even *methamphetamines* could be confusing. Try to think of ways to explain these concepts in simpler ways. Also, try to avoid violent or scary topics. Sometimes you can use symbolic language, like *yelling* for *gang violence*. You might also consider using metaphors to tell the story, or even tell the story from a particular point of view.

Remember: the purpose of this project is for you to tell the story of a social problem. Integrate this language into your story.

**Step two: thinking with your sociological imagination**
As you write your story, think about how your social problem relates to Mills' ideas on history and biography. Think about how individual decisions are often framed by larger social phenomena. Ask yourself how your social problem relates to individual decisions and how these decisions relate to larger elements of our society. Think about how we might resolve your social problem through changes in our society. MAKE SURE your solutions to your social problem are not individual solutions, but instead are societal solutions. Your story may have individual characters, but the solutions are much bigger. They are about solving the social problem at hand in many, many lives, not just the characters in your story.

**Step three: formatting issues and writing your draft**
In the final book, you will be required to have a minimum of 8-12 pages, and each page (or pair of pages) will need to tell a part of your story. Your final book will need to do the following things, so keep these in mind when writing your draft:

1. Identify and introduce your social problem to the reader
2. Explain why your social problem exists.
3. Explain how your social problem is experienced in our society.
4. Explain what/who keeps your social problem going, and what/who prevents it from ending.
5. Explain at least one solution to your problem from a societal level. Avoid individual solutions.

Once you have a first draft of your book text, think about how you can separate the text into a few sentences per page so that you know your book is long enough to fill 8-12 pages. I suggest reading your text out loud many times so you can hear what it sounds like. Rhyme schemes are always a great thing. Finally: if you are unsure about your draft, go read some children's books!

**Sociology ### Class Project Handout**
**Assignment #4**
**[INSERT SEMESTER AND YEAR]**

You have identified your social problem, you have researched your social problem, and now you have written a basic draft of your book. The time has come add the final touch: designing the actual book.

**Final Book Requirements:**
These requirements apply to the **final copy** of your children's book. To receive full points, your book must meet or exceed each of the below requirements.

1. Your book must be a minimum of **8-12 pages** of text and art, not including the front cover and back cover. Each page must have some kind of art or text on it. No pages may be blank. This includes the backs of pages.

2. Create a front and back cover for your book. Include the title and your name on the front cover. On the inside cover, include a brief biographical statement about the author (that's you!) and include some kind of art and or text on the back cover. Some students like to be creative with the back cover (such as including fake reviews of the book), and I encourage this.

3. You must include images and/or artwork in your book. Feel free to enlist help if you are not artistically inclined. Other options include using photos, web art, or any other imaginable format. Feel free to mix mediums. Additionally, feel free to be creative about the format your book takes. Your book need not be a traditional book. Digital books are also acceptable, but remember you will need a printed copy to submit for grading the last day of class.

4. On the last day of class, you will need to submit to me a physical copy of your book in some form. If you prefer to keep your original copy, turn in a photocopy version to me. Your final submitted copies will be archived in my office.

5. The text in your book must also meet the requirements from Assignment #3:
   A. Identify and introduce your social problem to the reader
   B. Explain why your social problem exists.
   C. Explain how your social problem is experienced in our society.
   D. Explain what/who keeps your social problem going, and what/who prevents it from ending.
   E. Explain at least one solution to your problem from a societal level. Avoid individual solutions.

If you have questions about the final assignment, I am available to answer your questions.

**Grading Rubric for Final Book**

| Element | Points |
|---|---|
| **Story** | |
| 1. Introduces social problem clearly | 10 |
| 2. Clearly explains why this is a social problem | 15 |
| 3. Offers a social solution to the problem | 10 |
| | Total: 35 |
| **Cover** | |
| 1. Name and compelling and relevant image | 5 |
| | Total: 5 |
| **Images** | |
| 1. Images are compelling and expressive | 10 |
| 2. Images are relevant and help tell the story | 10 |
| | Total: 20 |
| **Author's Note** | |
| 1. States the social problem clearly | 5 |
| 2. Explains why book is important | 5 |
| 3. Brief summary of the story | 5 |
| 4. Explains book's sociological perspective | 5 |
| | Total: 20 |
| **Other** | |
| 1. Overall quality of construction (i.e. neatness) | 10 |
| 2. No spelling or grammatical errors. | 10 |
| | Total: 20 |
| | **TOTAL: 100** |