DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 544 CS 211 973

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Seven. |
| INSTITUTION | National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill. |
| REPORT NO | ISBN-0-8141-22620 |
| PUB DATE | 89 |
| NOTE | 65p.; For Books One, Two, Three, Four, Five, and Six, see ED 239 301, ED 251 860, ED 263 361, ED 272 889, ED 284 292, and ED 297 345, respectively. |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC03 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Class Activities; Creative Writing; Educational Games; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Instruction; *Language Arts; *Language Usage; *Learning Activities; *Literature Appreciation; Speech Skills; Student Motivation; Teaching Methods; Writing Exercises; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes |

ABSTRACT

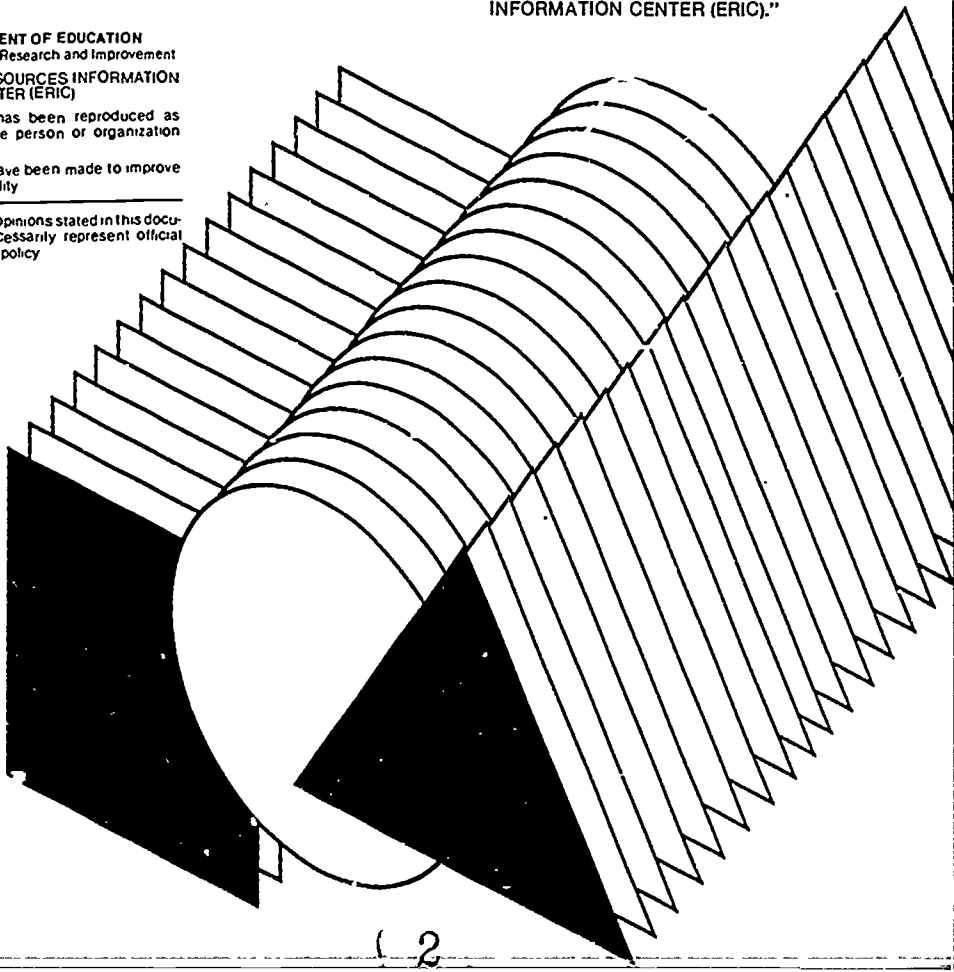
Contributed by English teachers across the United States, the activities contained in this booklet are intended to promote the effective teaching of English and the language arts. Teaching strategies offered in the first section of the booklet are designed to stimulate language exploration by helping students learn to tell stories from pictures, see the personal significance in famous quotations, feel comfortable asking questions, suggest solutions to problems posed by classmates, and approach poetry through illustration, movement, and popular music. Activities in the second section are designed to stimulate an appreciation and understanding of literature. Specific activities in this section include a "living literature museum," a way to introduce irony, a lighthearted preholiday exercise focusing on literary characters, and assignments to supplement the study of "Dandelion Wine." Teaching ideas in the third section provide the means for students to learn writing from a variety of different angles and for different purposes through prewriting and writing, and include using writing for self-discovery, a descriptive-writing session based on real estate ads, an in-house field trip, a project in which students write brochures, a way for middle school students to pass their expertise on to incoming students, and a long-term assignment to read, evaluate, and respond to the work of a newspaper columnist. (SR)

# IDEAS plus



## BOOK SEVEN





# IDEAS Plus

A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas

Book Seven

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801

Staff Editor: Felice A. Kaufmann

Book Design: Tom Kovaks for TGK Design

Illustrator: Richard Maul

NCTE Stock Number 22620



It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 84-3479

*IDEAS Plus* is published in August by the National Council of Teachers of English as an exclusive benefit of *NCTE Plus* membership. *NCTE Plus* membership also includes four issues of *NOTES Plus* (ISSN 0738-8624), published in September, November, January, and April. Annual membership dues are $50.00; $15.00 of this amount is for *NOTES Plus* and *IDEAS Plus*. Inquiries about *NCTE Plus* membership or communications regarding change of address and permission to reprint should be addressed to *NOTES Plus*, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. *POSTMASTER:* Send address changes to *NOTES Plus*, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Second-class postage paid at Urbana, Illinois, and at additional mailing offices.

# Contents

# Foreword

*IDEAS Plus* and its quarterly companion *NOTES Plus* are the principal benefits of *NCTE Plus* membership. *IDEAS Plus* is sent out at the end of the summer so that teachers will have it in hand as they begin the school year.

The ideas collected in this seventh edition of *IDEAS Plus* come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at an NCTE Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of *NOTES Plus* and *IDEAS Plus*.

# 1 Language Exploration

If your students take language for granted, the following exercises may help them to appreciate the power and subtlety of words. Through strategies gathered here, students will learn to tell stories from pictures, to see the personal significance in famous quotations, to feel comfortable asking questions, and to suggest solutions to problems posed by classmates. In addition, a trio of poetry-teaching strategies offers help to teachers and students alike through illustration, movement, and popular music.

## Storyboard Exchange

Prompted by my own fascination with animation as an art form and my experience with storyboards—courtesy of a computer graphics program—I recently integrated the following activity into my seventh-grade language arts curriculum.

I first distributed large sheets of drawing paper to students in one class. The students had just read Ray Bradbury's story "There Will Come Soft Rains," so as their first storyboard project I asked them to "draw" Bradbury's story in frame form, using pictures and no words. Next, to protect the student artists from personal reviews, I covered up their names and classes and assigned numbers to each storyboard.

At the start of my next class period, I handed out these numbered storyboards and asked the students in this second class to "read" the frames created by the first group of seventh graders. Students had five minutes to read, and then I asked for volunteers to get up and share the stories they had gleaned from the boards. After a few were shared, I asked students to write down the stories they had read. In addition, each student was to review the execution of the story—how well the art told the story, how clear the meaning was, and what questions the reviewer still had about the story. These comments were written on separate sheets of paper and addressed to the artist by using the assigned numbers. Each reviewer signed his or her comments with a reviewer number, also assigned by me.

When the students in the second class had completed the review process, I read aloud the Ray Bradbury story "There Will Come Soft Rains." Several

students were delighted to find that the stories they told from the storyboards indeed came close to matching the text of the Bradbury story. When asked if they thought one single storyboard panel could be viewed as the correct one, my students concluded that there was no single correct panel, but rather many possible appropriate interpretations of the text.

Next, I asked students if they would like to share some of their own storyboards for review by the artists whose panels they had just critiqued. Students were delighted by the idea, so the next class period was devoted to their creation of storyboards inspired by various favorite stories.

On the same day that the second class created storyboards, the original artists were receiving their panels back, along with the responses from the peer reviewers. Students were flattered by the comments and attention paid their work, and requested the continuation of this storyboard network.

I revised the assignment for the next set of storyboards and expanded the exchange to involve a third language arts class. I assigned students in one class to write original stories, distributed these stories among the students in a second class for storyboard drawing, and then invited the students in a third class to review both the original stories and the storyboards. The students in the third class provided comments and questions that were helpful to both the story writers and the storyboard artists.

As a result of this experiment, a storyboard exchange network sprang up and has been thriving at my school. I am now looking into further possibilities for our exchange—maybe even involving our school art teacher and our computer graphics instructor. To celebrate the successful collaboration among classes, we hope to develop a joint exhibit of storyboards and published stories, including sample critiques and student annotations.

*Rose Reissman, Community School District Two, New York*

**Today's Question Is . . .**

With class sizes as large as they are, how can we get the student to ask questions and feel free enough from peer pressure to probe? And how can we make class participation an accountable factor? Every class has at least one student falling out of the chair to answer, but we need to make sure that everyone talks periodically.

I began this idea with my junior English Accelerated class, where peer pressure is a palpable presence. It worked so well that I use it now with my remedial freshmen.

Each day a different student is responsible for asking me one question about the material we are studying. To assign a day to a student, I read down my class list and post the name of the assigned student one day in advance.

The student's question is written on a 3" × 5" card and handed in at the beginning of the class period. Any question related to the material is fair game. (Although one student has the assignment of the question on a particular day, other students may also write down questions and turn them in.)

After I read the question, the class gets a chance to answer it. Often these questions are the beginning of a good discussion, particularly if the student has written an analysis or synthesis question.

This strategy is deceptively simple. In the beginning of the year students wrote all their questions on cards—anonymously, if they wished—and on some days I ended up with ten or fifteen cards. Now, every day more and more students ask questions aloud in class.

I hold on to the question cards through the semester and we use them for review before a test.

*Lynn P. Dieter, Maine Township High School East, Park Ridge, Illinois*

## Expanded Quotations

Each month I supply my eleventh-grade American Literature students with a blank calendar on which to write their assignments as I post them weekly. But that's not the only use to which I put the calendar. At the top of each month's calendar, I print a quotation from a famous American writer from the literary period we are studying. This quotation serves as the inspiration for an impromptu "Expanded Quotations" writing assignment.

I assign students to write a brief explanation of the quote and how it relates to their individual life experiences.

Here are a few of the quotations I have used this year:

> A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, from *Self-Reliance*)
>
> If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. (Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden*)
>
> A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. (Walt Whitman, from "Song of Myself")
>
> It takes life to love Life. (Edgar Lee Masters, from "Lucinda Matlock")

As an example of the insights prompted by this exercise, here's a sample writing from one of my students. (The quotation is one attributed, in varying forms, to many different people.)

> "He that lieth down with dogs, shall rise up with fleas." These words of Benjamin Franklin remain true for all people of all creeds. Habits that you pick up usually derive from someone you spend much time with. A prime example of this would be my brother. He was the world's biggest slob until my extremely clean and organized stepfather came into the picture. At one time, a person would walk down the hall and smell the rank odor that had seeped from under my brother's door. On the other hand my step father would be on his hands and knees cleaning the baseboards with Q-tips. When my new father came into the picture my brother started modeling himself after Joe. Now, my brother insists that you take off your shoes before entering his room, which is immaculate!

This writing assignment emphasizes the concept that I like to stress about literature, namely that it is most often about common concerns that are relevant to all human beings in all ages.

*Kathleen Parks, Quartz Hill High School, Lancaster, California*

## Ideawriting: Brainstorming via Computer

"Ideawriting" is group brainstorming. I have found it to be a very good way to generate ideas for an essay assignment, especially when used in a microlab setting. The following assignment is adapted from *Guide for Leaders Using Ideawriting*, by Carol Moore and James Coke (The Academy for Contemporary Problems, September 1979).

Students open a new computer file called "problem." In it, they describe as fully as possible a problem they are currently facing at home, school, or work. They are to describe what the problem is, why it arose, who is involved, what the negative effects are, and so on. The time allotted is fifteen minutes.

Next, students play "musical computers," moving to the computer beside them, reading that student's problem on the screen, and typing in their comments. Comments may include additional questions, solutions, descriptions of similar problems, or any other responses students feel would help the writer. Students type their names at the end of their responses so that they can be questioned later. I allot five minutes per response. (Note: this time can be expanded depending on the length of the class period; five minutes seems to be the minimum time needed to get useful responses.)

When time is up, students move on to the next computer, read the original problem and the responses, and write a response to any of the text on the screen (the problem or response). They may insert their comments wherever

they are appropriate, not necessarily only at the end. I allot five minutes for this step also.

This procedure is repeated until students get back to their own computers. They are then instructed to read all the comments, get additional information from respondents, if desired, and save their files. The homework assignment is to write an essay discussing the problem and suggesting a possible solution.

For anyone teaching writing in a microlab, this is a good exercise to use relatively early in the term. It provides keyboarding experience in a painless way and it gives students practice scrolling through text, moving the cursor, and inserting text at places other than at the end of the document. It also helps students get to know each other and reinforces the philosophy of collaborative learning.

Groups should generally consist of about five or six students, although I have had good results with groups as large as ten.

This assignment can also be used in a regular classroom setting; there, students write their problem on a tablet and pass the tablet to the next person for comments. The process continues until the original tablet returns to the writer with comments from all group members.

*Linda J. Stine, Lincoln University, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania*

## Physical Poetry

Instead of assigning poems to be read, why not assign them to be acted out? Many students enjoy trying out their dramatic abilities and all enjoy watching. Furthermore, as one of my students said, "You understand the poem better by acting it out."

Almost any poem might be used. However, beginning students will have more success with poems that contain action or dialogue or both. When students become more familiar with poetry, they may feel comfortable acting out more subtle images such as flowers opening or rain falling. Some of the most successful poems for my junior high students have been the following:

"Ku Klux" by Langston Hughes
"My Enemy Was Dreaming" by Norman Russell
"Constantly risking absurdity" by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
any poem by Shel Silverstein

Some students are understandably shy about performing in front of the class. These students may be a bit less hesitant if, when you make group assignments, you allow them to work with their friends. Another way to reduce anxiety is to allow reluctant students to be the readers as other students pan-

tomime the action. Also, you might make this an ungraded activity; make it clear that everyone is expected to do something and no one will just watch.

First, go over the poems as a class. You might want to read them aloud or ask if there are student volunteers to read. For a class of 30, six to ten poems from which to choose is sufficient.

Second, divide students into groups of two to four. One person in each group may be the narrator while the others pantomime the action, or two people may divide the dialogue and narration while also acting out the part.

Give groups some time to work out their presentation. With the poems above, junior high students need ten to fifteen minutes to rehearse.

Physically interpreting a poem gets students more involved than simply reading and makes students feel that they really understand the poem. After each group makes its presentation, remember to applaud. It's a form of appreciation that student actors can relate to.

*Louann Reid, Douglas County High School. Castle Rock, Colorado*

## Illustrating Poetry

When I was a first-year teacher struggling to convince my eighth graders that they could read and understand poetry, one of my students offered this idea. Now, twenty years later, it is still one of my most effective methods for teaching poetry.

After reading and discussing several narrative poems such as "Fifteen," by William Stafford, "Foul Shot," by Edwin E. Hoey, "Jabberwocky," by Lewis Carroll, and "Casey at the Bat," by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, I have my students choose one poem to illustrate in the form of a comic strip. They must use at least four frames, but more are allowed. Less confident artists may use stick people. I encourage the use of colored pencils or markers.

Even the most reluctant poetry readers enjoy this assignment and amaze me with their detailed drawings. I have found the comic strip to be very successful with "slow" learners and "poor" readers. Grades are based on accuracy of representation of the poem, not on artistic talent.

*Sharon M. Rinderer, Highland Junior High, Highland, Illinois*

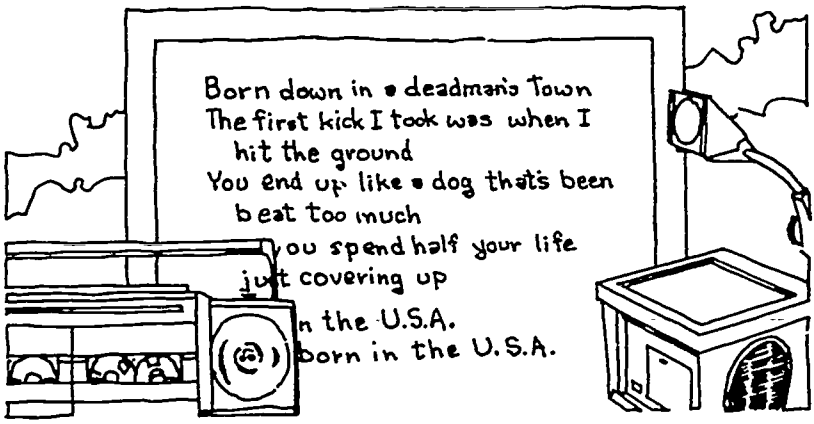
## Introducing Poetry through Prose

To introduce a poetry unit to sophomores, I use a "rear-door" approach. Before class, I paraphrase a song on the chalkboard. For the past few years, I have used Billy Joel's "Goodnight, Saigon." Students read the paraphrase as they come into the classroom, and invariably I hear someone remark, "That

sounds familiar." When students are seated, I admit that the words on the chalkboard are a paraphrased version of the lyrics to a song. After I explain that "Goodnight, Saigon" is a Viet Nam War era song, I play a cassette recording of it. Students quickly pick up the sound of the helicopters and the night sounds that begin and end the song.

After touching on the "frame" structure of the song, I use the overhead projector to display the actual lyrics. I ask students what they think makes the song effective. Students often point out specific words and phrases, as well as such elements as rhyme and rhythm. I take this opportunity to point out poetic elements that students haven't mentioned, which might include, for example, the couplet form, allusions, and similes.

Although this particular Billy Joel song is becoming dated, it still works well with my students. Of course, any well-written current song could be used. The key is to present the song lyrics first in paraphrased form to catch students' attention and highlight the differences between prose and poetry.




Even students who don't think they know much about poetry will find that they can recognize and talk about differences between the paraphrased prose version of a song and the actual lyrics. Such discussion can help students to understand the patterns and elements that make up a poem.

*Dorothy L. Kivett, Fort Scott High School, Fort Scott, Kansas*

### The Compliments Game

I have always approached the last week of middle school with nothing less than dread as I considered the inevitable onslaught of review sheets, exams,

and grades to be averaged—not to mention the usual battle against a ceaseless barrage of squirt guns, confetti, cameras, and autograph books. A few years ago I developed a "secret weapon" to combat some of these end-of-the-year pressures, and at the same time, channel students' pre-summer energy into a constructive activity. I call it the "Compliments Game."

Each player receives a blank, unsealed envelope containing as many blank slips of paper as there are players. (Example: 30 students + 1 teacher = 31. You will need 31 envelopes with 31 blank slips in each envelope.)

Each player writes his or her name on the front of the envelope. At a signal from the teacher, the envelopes are passed to the next person in a predetermined pattern. On one of the blank slips inside the envelope, players are directed to write a complimentary comment about the person whose name is on the envelope. Students have 60 seconds to write. The teacher then gives the signal again and the process continues until the envelopes return to their original owners. Students must pass only at the teacher's signal, one envelope at a time, and in the correct pattern for the envelopes to end up in the right places at the end of the game. My students have always been eager to receive their own envelopes back, read their compliments, and try to guess who said what. I usually allow a few minutes at the end of the game for this.

For those of you whose mental alarm systems have gone off at the thought of your class's "Mischievous Mark" or "Backstabbing Betsy" trying to give compliments to everyone in the class, don't give up yet! At the beginning I set up some basic rules for compliments. They must be sincere, specific, preferably about personality and talents rather than physical appearance, and must not hold even a hint of negativism. (In my class both negative comments and students are withdrawn from the game.) If you think that your students may have a difficult time thinking of appropriate compliments, you may want to preface the game with a brainstorming activity.

Although I use this activity to provide positive closure for the year and a brief reprieve from an intensive exam schedule, the "Compliments Game" can be played at any time. It can be adapted to small groups and varied to meet reading and language arts objectives such as identification and classification of positive and negative traits, inference supported by detail, and analysis of characters in literature.

The students will enjoy the "Compliments Game" however you choose to play it. From the teacher's point of view, I can only say that those quickly scribbled compliments from my students have proven much more valuable to me than any professional evaluation. So don't recoil in fear when week 36 rolls around again. Play the "Compliments Game," and kill them with kindness!

*Rhonda Murphy, Grisham Middle School, Austin, Texas*

## Still More Words of Wisdom

Like the author of the "Words of Wisdom" idea published in *IDEAS Plus Book Six*, I, too, have a favorite way to share memorable quotations with my students. In my classes, students keep a "Words of Wisdom" notebook. On Monday of each week, students spend the first ten minutes of the class period responding in writing to a quotation written on a special section of the chalkboard—a section enclosed by a decorative border and labeled "Words of Wisdom." Because selected quotations may vary greatly in length, I make the section large enough for a quotation of paragraph length.

To lessen the students' inevitable fear of writing "the wrong thing," I give them a list of questions to ask themselves about the quotation:

> What do I think this quotation is saying?
>
> Do I strongly agree or disagree with what it says? Why?
>
> Can I think of examples of incidents that illustrate the truth or fallacy of this quotation? Which incidents?
>
> Can these words apply to daily life experiences? Which experiences?
>
> Does the quotation remind me of anything else I have heard? Is the quotation difficult to comprehend? If so, why?

Because the written response is timed with the bell that begins Monday's class period, I find that many students enter class early to have time to contemplate the quotation before writing. Without the threat of being graded on grammar, punctuation, and spelling, students are more likely to open up and produce thought on Bloom's three highest levels of learning—evaluation, synthesis, and analysis.

Since students enjoy seeing something a little different on the "Words of Wisdom" board every once in a while, I occasionally make use of the pun on my last name (Wisdom), and ask students to respond in writing to *my* words. Another variation I use is to ask students to create their own "words of wisdom," exchange them with someone else in the class, and respond in writing to their classmate's words.

The success of this prewriting activity can be seen in the students' progressively longer and more in-depth responses from week to week. With oral sharing of responses, my students learn from one another, and are even able to recall quotations to illustrate points in expository themes later in the year.

*Patricia Wisdom, McKinney High School, McKinney, Texas*

## Tapping Word Power

Upon completing study of adjectives and adverbs, I use this assignment to give students practice in using what they've learned. First, I assign students to

write a short, detailed description of a real person. Class time is given to brainstorm and outline, and then students have several days to write and revise on their own time.

Next, the students gather into groups of four to share their descriptions. After they have a chance to read one another's writings, I introduce the next step: students are to delete all descriptive words from their writings and read the results.

Most students readily recognize that the resultant writing, bare of all modifiers, is dull and awkward. Students now rewrite again, this time inserting descriptive words, but only those which are of a favorable nature. Students then share their writings again.

Finally, students replace the favorable terms with distinctly negative adjectives and adverbs. After these final products are shared and discussed, students talk about what they have just demonstrated and learned. Volunteers tell the class how the steps they went through affected the tone and meaning of their descriptions.

Through these "metamorphoses," students experience firsthand the power of words to create moods and the importance of careful word choice in writing.

*Kathleen Meyer, Rosary High School, Aurora, Illinois*

## Sensational Sentences

I use this idea to nurture and encourage sentence revision and descriptive detail among my senior composition students.

Each day as they enter class, students find a simple sentence on the board. Their assignment is to expand on this sentence as much as possible in a three- to five-minute time period. I ask students to be as imaginative as they can while still creating a sentence that is clearly understandable. The point of adding words is not to make long sentences, but to make vivid, descriptive ones. Students should choose specifics that help to create a strong image and a sense of mood.

When I call "time," students stop writing. I ask them to spend about five minutes sharing their sentences with their peers. Then I invite volunteers to read their sentences aloud to the class.

Here's an example of a simple sentence and one student's expanded version.

> She wrote a note.
>
> Student's version: The girl with the black curly hair wrote a terse note vilifying the character and personality of my best friend.

As the semester progresses, I have all students share two to three times per week, but on days when time is limited, I might ask for only a few volunteers.

There is always a lot of variety among students' sentences. Sharing and discussing sentences is a nonthreatening way for students to get feedback on their use of description and detail. And due to the keen competition that evolves for the most interesting sentence, this activity also motivates students to use fresh, original language. Students' frequent use of the thesaurus is a side benefit, and helps to extend vocabularies painlessly. It comes as no surprise to me when later student essays show the results of this daily practice in descriptive detail and sentence variety.

*Pat George, Washington Preparatory High School, Los Angeles, California*

### A Charming Strategy

You've heard of the Oscars, the Emmys, the Grammys—now we have the Charmings! Named after the famous Prince Charming, these awards are presented by my students to the writers of the best fairy tales.

First, I read a few well-known fairy tales to my students. We spend a few moments discussing and analyzing common elements: themes, settings, characters, and phrasing. Students who have never read classic fairy tales, or who have forgotten the ones their parents read to them, are often surprised at the violence and ghoulish details in these tales.

Next, the students write their own fairy tales. They exchange and read each other's tales until everyone has had a chance to read all the compositions. Then each student nominates a story in each of the following categories: Best Villain, Best Dialogue, Best Major Character (Hero or Heroine), Best Conflict, Best Minor Character, Best Setting, Best Rhyme, Best Description, Best Fairy Tale. I tally the votes, compile a list of nominees for each category, and place the winning titles in the envelopes.

At the ceremony, one student emcees, and student presenters read the criteria by which each tale was judged, announce the nominees, and present a Charming award to each winner. Winners recite acceptance speeches, thank "everyone who made this possible," and, naturally, "live happily ever after."

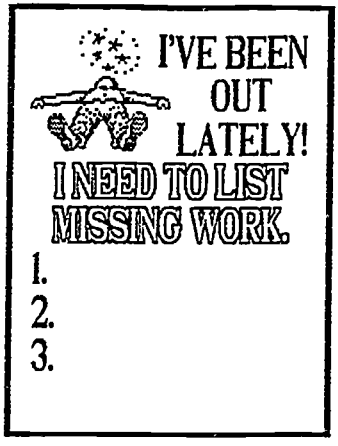
*Kristine Datres, Curtin Middle School, Williamsport, Pennsylvania*

### Placing the Burden Where It Belongs

As teachers become more and more accountable for student achievement, I get crabby—and disorganized—very quickly. Sometimes it seems that I care more about students' grades than they do.

So, in the name of "enough is enough," I looked for a way to make students more accountable for what they missed while they were away from my class—whether they were sick, on vacation, or out to lunch. Too often, students are waiting for me to approach them upon their return to class. I could write lists for each absent student, as my daughter's fifth-grade teacher does, but in high school, students should begin taking responsibility for missing work.

In placing the burden on students, I also wanted to find a system which would help keep them better organized. The following form turned out to be a useful solution, serving both as a prompt and a record.




Upon returning to class after an absence, students are expected to take the initiative, question classmates, and list the necessary work. As they complete assignments, they have the form handy as a reminder of work still outstanding.

*Barry Gadlin, Elk Grove High School, Elk Grove Village, Illinois*

## Information Scavenger Hunt

In order to learn more about my students and to help them become acquainted with their fellow classmates, I hold a modified scavenger hunt during part of the first class. I design a signature sheet with at least as many items as there are students in the class. The directions are self-explanatory, but I go over the requirements when the handout is distributed.

I always participate with the class and am amazed by the interests and experiences of the students. Because each person signs at least one blank on

each sheet, some students quickly realize that certain items can be signed by only a few individuals. Those who do not recognize this often have to revise their sheets to complete them correctly. When we discuss the activity and what we learned from it, these students observe that they should have skimmed the entire list before beginning. The importance of previewing tasks carries over to later assignments.

Some items are geared primarily for my information. Knowing, for example, that most students are familiar with a word processing program or can type helps me when planning visits to the computer lab to "publish" final drafts. Other items are simply conversation starters. Each time I have used this activity students are at first reluctant to move from the security of their desks, but they quickly learn that my class is a nonthreatening environment. This is crucial for our future writing response groups and discussions.

The following handout is one I created for this year's creative writing class:

> Our class consists of individuals with special talents and interests. As you quietly talk with one another, get one signature beside each item. Each person must sign at least one blank on each sheet; one person can sign no more than two blanks on any sheet.
>
> 1. has never had a cavity _____
> 2. has lived in a foreign country _____
> 3. attended Brewbaker Junior High School last year _____
> 4. has been on a newspaper or yearbook staff _____
> 5. can recite the first line of the Gettysburg Address _____
> 6. is taking Algebra I this year _____
> 7. can use a word processing program _____
> 8. has won a contest _____
> 9. has competed in an athletic event in the past two years _____
> 10. went to Florida this summer _____
> 11. has worn or now wears braces _____
> 12. subscribes to at least one magazine _____
> 13. knows the principal's first name (Write it down, too!) _____
> 14. has had a broken bone _____
> 15. does not like frozen yogurt _____
> 16. has been to a movie in the past five days _____
> 17. has a brother or sister who also attends this school _____
> 18. has seen a live theatrical performance _____

19. can type _____
20. is an only child _____
21. can play a musical instrument _____
22. has attended more than seven schools _____
23. has lived in Montgomery for more than seven years _____
24. read at least one book over the summer _____
25. is taking Spanish I this year _____
26. has more than three pets _____

*Jo Anne Raiford Bryant, Brewbaker Junior High School, Montgomery, Alabama*

# 2 Literature

Some of students' richest memories of their school days may turn out to be memories of novels, poems, and stories discovered for the first time in an English classroom. As English teachers, we can ensure students a memorable experience of literature with well-chosen strategies for exploring reading assignments. Some of the activities collected here should fit the bill; included are an idea for a "living literature museum," a way to introduce irony before teaching *Gulliver's Travels*, a lighthearted preholiday exercise focusing on literary characters, and assignments to supplement the study of "Young Goodman Brown," *Dandelion Wine*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Daisy Miller*, and tales from Arthurian legend.

## Interdepartmental Sharing

Although educators know that showing students a relationship between the different subjects students are learning is a worthy goal, accomplishing it can seem difficult, even in a small school. Teachers are not necessarily aware of what is being taught in the classrooms outside of their own, and trying to schedule meetings for the purpose of having teachers share their lesson plans is not practical given already crowded schedules.

Our principal found an effective way to help us get a sense of what our students are learning in other classes. She wrote the name of each course and student activity, including sports (about 40 offerings total), on a separate piece of construction paper and arranged these blocks into a pattern on a wall in our faculty room. These blocks remain posted for the semester, but each week the principal tapes onto the colorful blocks the main topics being covered in each class. Our teachers turn in weekly lesson plans so the principal can easily record and tape up these topics. Now our faculty can see, at a glance, everything that is being studied in a given week and what is happening in student activities. The same idea could be adapted to a larger school by sharing only within departments instead of sharing school-wide.

This display has led to a valuable pooling of resources among teachers in the faculty room and also to more interdisciplinary classroom discussions. I was able to see, for example, that my juniors were studying the turn of the

century in American history just before we began studying the same period in American literature. Thus, I could begin my unit by asking the students what was happening during that time in history, confident that they would understand and be able to answer the questions I was asking. The students benefit from this review and reinforcement of what they have learned, and they can see that what they study in one class is of value in another.

*Kathleen Norris, Monroe Catholic High School, Fairbanks, Alaska*

### The Many Faces of *Daisy Miller*

Few teachers would assay the novels of Henry James except perhaps for an advanced placement class. But have you ever tried *Daisy Miller*? It is short, neatly divided into two parts, and addresses a problem which seldom fails to hook young readers—romantic attraction and misunderstanding. So many facets of the plot appeal: a young girl ignorant of the customs of a strange country; a man drawn to her but influenced by society; and, finally, the third person of the triangle, a handsome fortune hunter.

The novel can be the basis of many varied discussion and creative writing assignments, some suggestions for which are listed below:

1. Journals: Daisy writes a letter to a friend in Schenectady. Write a letter of advice to Daisy.
2. Viewpoint essays: Pretend to be a character you don't like (e.g., Mrs. Costello) and write the diary entry of that person after a particular meeting with Daisy.
3. Dialogues: Giovanelli discusses Daisy with a friend. Mrs. Walker meets Mrs. Costello in the Borgese Gardens.
4. Inventing scenes:

   Daisy and her family aboard the ship, *The City of Richmond*, on their way to Europe.

   Daisy meets Winterbourne's "foreign lady."

   Winterbourne proposes to Daisy.

   Daisy and Giovanelli are introduced by the courier.
5. Modernizing an episode: Update the encounter between Randolph and Winterbourne in the garden at Vevey. Give a modern version of Mrs. Walker's party.
6. Changing an event: Daisy accepts Mrs. Walker's suggestion to ride with her in the carriage. Daisy recovers from "Roman Fever."

As a culminating activity, students can meet in groups to prepare an interview with Henry James, formulating such questions as "Who was the 'foreign

lady' in Geneva?" "Why didn't you let Daisy live?" "What happened to Mr. Giovanelli after the funeral?" One student in each group may pretend to be Henry James and respond to the questions. Other groups might contribute articles to a Roman newspaper containing an obituary for Daisy Miller.

When the above approaches are combined with reading and study, teachers will find *Daisy Miller* a rewarding experience that evokes much student discussion and debate.

*Rosemary Gelshenen, Norman Thomas High School, New York, New York*

## Understanding Tone in *The Red Badge Of Courage*

"Tone reflects the attitude an author takes toward his subject matter." To tell this to my tenth-grade students is almost meaningless, and for students to grasp the significance of tone in a long work is especially difficult. The following simple exercise is helpful to students because it is short and concrete and helps them arrive at accurate conclusions about *The Red Badge of Courage.*

As I tell my students, we all use metaphors and similes to convey our attitudes: a big old car which uses a lot of gas and has poor pickup is a pig; a sleek car with speed and maneuverability is a Mustang or Cougar or Jaguar. In *The Red Badge of Courage* Stephen Crane uses metaphors and similes to convey his attitudes on war and war's effects on soldiers.

After distributing the book, I tell students to reserve some pages in their notebooks for a special assignment. As we read the novel, students make notes on all of Crane's similes and metaphors on war and its effects on soldiers. We review them only in conjunction with the meaning of the chapter in which they are found.

When we finish the novel, we examine students' compiled lists to discover what is the subject matter of the metaphors and similes, what are Crane's attitudes expressed in the metaphors and similes, whether the attitudes expressed are consistent, and whether these attitudes are consistent with other elements of the story.

The following list contains just a few of the metaphors and similes discovered and discussed by my students:

> Chapter 3
>
> They were going to look at war, the red animal—war, the blood-swollen god.
>
> Chapter 4
>
> A shell screaming like a storm banshee went over the huddled heads of the reserves.

Chapter 5
Perspiration streamed down the youth's face, which was soiled like that of a weeping urchin.
Chapter 6
The slaves toiling in the temple of this god began to feel rebellion at his harsh task.
Chapter 8
The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him.

The final assignment is an expository essay on the tone of *The Red Badge of Courage*.

*Robert E. Walsh, H. Frank Carey High School, Franklin Square, New York*

## Superman in the Classroom

For basic English students to learn literary terms can be torture for them and their teacher. Enter, Superman!

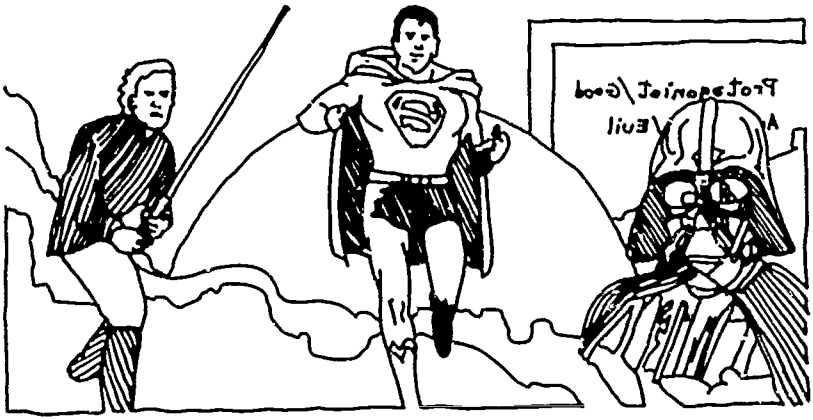
As my eleventh-graders get to know me, they learn that I admire the actor, Christopher Reeve, and especially his characterization of Superman/Clark Kent. This interest has led me to devise a way to help my students understand nine important literary terms.

After we define and talk about the terms, I supplement the definitions with facts about Superman.

*Allegory:* Superman represents good. Lex Luther represents evil.
*Characterization:* Clark Kent is the mild-mannered reporter. Lex Luther is an evil genius.
*Conflict:* The basic struggle of good versus evil and the internal conflict of Clark Kent wanting to reveal his real identity.
*Fantasy:* Krypton is an unreal world, just as Superman is an unreal character.
*Foil:* Lex Luther is a foil to our hero and vice versa.
*Hyperbole:* "Faster than a speeding bullet." "Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound."
*Metaphor:* "Man of steel." "It's a bird, it's a plane, . . . ."
*Protagonist:* Superman is the leading character.
*Unrequited love* (not quite a literary term, but worth knowing): Clark Kent persistently pines for Lois Lane, who yearns only for Superman.

Dan Kirby and Tom Liner state in their book *Inside Out: Development Strategies for Teaching Writing* (Boynton Cook, 1981, p. 204), "Using film

and other media as stimuli to thinking and feeling allows students the freedom of their own responses." My students' responses have certainly supported this statement. The allusion to the Superman movies keeps my students' interest high, and the details we associate with literary terms serve as mnemonic devices.



Next, I ask students to come up with their own movie details to illustrate the meaning of each one. For example, students have cited Luke Skywalker as a foil to Darth Vader and vice versa; Indiana Jones as the protagonist of "Raiders of the Lost Ark," and, to illustrate fantasy, the planet Dune, as well as the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. When students can apply literary terms to their own favorite movies and television programs, then I know the terms are likely to be remembered.

*Rose Mary Fetter, Leander High School, Leander, Texas*

## Literary Gifts

Here's an assignment that can help keep students' interest during those difficult weeks before the winter holidays. First, I ask students to write their names on slips of paper. I place the slips in a bowl and ask each student to draw one. Next, I ask students to make an autobiographical sheet with the following information about themselves:

1. name
2. favorite colors
3. favorite foods

4. favorite activities
5. special talents
6. ambitions
7. a paragraph describing "the real you"

The completed sheets are placed in a box at the back of the room so that students may unobtrusively take the sheet of the person whose name they drew.

The assignment is for each student to make a "literary" gift—a gift that relates in some way to writing or literature— especially for the person whose name was drawn. Students use the autobiographical information to customize their gift to fit the recipient. (A student with a special talent such as cartooning, calligraphy, or pottery may want to use that talent to make a gift. I allow this as long as the student includes as part of the gift a written explanation of the process involved in its making.)

Students make the gifts on their own time. I provide construction paper, glue, markers, and decorative stickers at recesses for anyone who wants to use them.

I set a presentation date that gives students several days to work on their gifts. On the assigned day, students present their gifts orally, one at a time, and each explains the choice of gift and the work involved.

Are high school juniors too old for surprise gifts? Don't you believe it! Although there are always a few who complain in the beginning, *all* students appear on presentation day with creative, thoughtful gifts, such as "name poems," illustrated letters of appreciation, verses written in calligraphy, wall plaques honoring the recipient, giant cards, and booklets of favorite poems copied by hand.

In my year-end evaluation, this project is consistently rated as the favorite activity, and former students tell me years later that they still treasure their "literary" gifts.

*Jo Anne C. Knight, Thibodaux High School, Thibodaux, Louisiana*

## "Star Wars" vs. Arthurian Legend

As a teacher of high school sophomores, I have found a wide range of abilities among my students. The following lesson proved to be an effective way to teach Arthurian legend to a group of students with mixed abilities and levels of motivation.

On day one, I used transparencies to present a brief history of the Arthurian legend, reviewing characters and giving a brief synopsis of the "Holy Grail" and the "Sword of the Lake" adventures.

On day two, I asked students to begin reading the tales included in our text. I encouraged active participation in the reading; students could ask questions and jot down notes or comments as they read. They enjoyed the humor in "The Tale of Sir Gareth," and made comparisons among Gareth, Arthur, and Lancelot.

On days three, four, and five, we continued the reading and questioning process. After students had completed the reading, we briefly reviewed the characters and action.

On day six, students were ready to begin viewing "Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back." I chose this film because the characters, action, and romantic relationship between Han and Princess Leia make it an interesting vehicle of comparison with Arthurian legend.

Days seven, eight, and nine were viewing days. I used intermissions in the film to bring up elements from Arthurian legend and start students thinking about comparisons and contrasts.

On day ten, I gave students a worksheet containing the questions shown below and asked students to jot down their responses. Having the movie as a reference point made it much easier for students to examine and discuss elements of the Arthurian legend. I found students more than ready to share their ideas about Luke, Arthur, and the similarities and differences between the two works. We then used the completed worksheets as a starting point for class discussion.

*Worksheet on "Star Wars—The Empire Strikes Back" and the Arthurian Legend*

First, consider the themes of both the legend and the science fiction production, "Star Wars." (The theme of a work expresses the moral that the author wants to convey; it often explores human values.) Make a list of the moral values of the two protagonists.

Arthur's values Luke's values

(Here, I leave room for six or seven entries.)

On the following chart, write the names of "Star Wars" characters who are similar in some way to the Arthurian characters listed in the first column. Use the third column to write brief descriptions of their similarities.

| Arthurian Legend | "Star Wars" | Similarities |
|---|---|---|
| King Arthur | | |
| Merlin | | |
| Sir Kay | | |
| Sir Lancelot | | |
| Sir Tarquine | | |

Morgan le Fay
Mordred
Sir Gawain
Beaumains
Lady Lynet
Lady Lyoness
the Black Knight
the Red Knight
the Green Knight
the Puce Knight
Sir Gryngamour
Queen Guinevere
King Bagdemagus
dwarf

Add other characters if you can justify their roles in the movie or the legend.

"Star Wars" is in some ways a typical epic romance. List examples of each of the following:

1. a hero
2. a quest
3. a perilous journey
4. an enchantment
5. the triumph of good over evil
6. the disguise

There are sharp divisions between the social classes in the Arthurian legend. Do those same divisions exist in "Star Wars"? If you think so, describe the social classes in "Star Wars."

List some examples of comic scenes in "Star Wars."

Citing the text, list some comic scenes from the Arthurian tales we have read.

*Cynthia Fowler, Troup Comprehensive High School, LaGrange, Georgia*

## Critical Cartoons and Critical Thinking

Much satire has as its central purpose the reform of people and institutions. When teaching satire to my high school students, I explain to them that satirists such as Mark Twain make their points through such techniques as sarcasm, exaggeration, humor, and absurdity. To check and evaluate students'

understanding of this literary concept, I assign them to cut out a cartoon or comic strip—one that is political in nature—and to write a caption that explains the topic being satirized.

In preparation for this assignment, I distribute copies of several local newspapers. We spend a few minutes locating and reading satirical cartoons. These may include both one-frame cartoons from the editorial section and appropriate comic strips from the funny pages. I ask students to help me make a list of the topics touched on in these cartoons. Our list typically includes current c'·thing fads, commercialism, television, government, greed, smoking, and vegetarianism, just to name a few.

From discussing popular topics for satire, we move to a discussion of the ways that satirists get their point across. I illustrate the use of sarcasm, exaggeration, humor, and absurdity with the help of a few cartoons collected ahead of time specifically for this purpose.

I then ask each student to choose one cartoon or comic strip to write about. In one or two paragraphs, students are to explain what the topic is, what point the satirist is making, how he or she tries to get the point across, and whether or not the message is effective.

In a later class period, students may be asked to present their comic strips or cartoons, along with their explanations and comments, to their classmates. Through this activity, students not only increase their understanding of satire, but do some serious thinking about world affairs and current issues.

*Jacqueline Hall, Abraham Lincoln High School, Council Bluffs, Iowa*

## Mapping "Young Goodman Brown"

Each year I find that some students have difficulty with Hawthorne's story "Young Goodman Brown." I decided that, for those students in particular, the story would be more comprehensible if they could "see" it. During the past three or four years, the following lesson evolved.

In the days preceding the reading of "Young Goodman Brown," my students are introduced to Puritan thought and Calvinism. They read and discuss excerpts from Bradford, Bradstreet, and Jonathan Edwards. With this groundwork behind them, students are assigned the first reading of Hawthorne's story.

The next day, I ask students to spend half of the class period reexamining the story and beginning to sketch a "map" of Brown's journey. I suggest that students make particular note of where Brown goes, which people he sees or hears, and the things he learns. For the second half of the period I assign students to groups and ask them to compare notes and discuss where they agree and disagree.

On the second day, I ask students to push tables together and begin working with their groups right away. I provide each group with a large piece of butcher paper and drawing supplies. Students are instructed to create their map (with all members contributing) and to be prepared to have a spokesperson ready to explain their drawing during the last fifteen to twenty minutes of the class period. I also advise them that I will be judging which group I feel has done the best job of visually representing what happens in the story. All members of the group sign their names on the back of the map.

Students in my classes take an active part in this map-making activity, often with three or four students drawing different sections of the map at the same time (after the plan has been sketched in pencil). There is active discussion and often disagreements which must be resolved. The final drawings and explanations reveal a great deal of creative insight and interpretation, including the decision each group must ultimately make as to whether this was a real journey or just a bad dream.

This activity helps students understand "Young Goodman Brown" and gives them insight into themes of initiation and journey. When we finish, students are ready for Cotton Mather's "The Wonders of the Invisible World," Benet's "We Aren't Superstitious," and finally, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible.*

*Ethel Clarke, Lindbergh High School, Renton, Washington*

## Don't Thank Me—Thank Woody Allen

As strange as it may sound, I have Woody Allen to thank, in part, for making a difficult work of eighteenth-century satire more approachable for my students. I use his film *Sleeper* to link an introduction to satire with the study of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* My first approach, though, involves the use of political cartoons.

I introduce students to satire indirectly by bringing to class photocopies of several cartoons that comment upon current social and political concerns. I take most of the cartoons from the "Perspectives" section of *Newsweek* and from *The New Yorker.* After students have had a chance to read each cartoon, I tell them to pretend that I live several hundred years in the future and cannot understand the humor in any of the cartoons. My students' job is to explain the context of each joke to me.

Students enjoy playing the teacher, and, in the process, they tap their own knowledge of current events. After students have thoroughly explained where the humor lies in each cartoon, I ask them if they can see any universal issues suggested by the situations depicted. I also ask students to point out the particular human traits, foibles, and failings illustrated in each cartoon. Then I help students come up with a general definition of satire, such as "using

words or pictures to make fun of human weaknesses." This allows a natural transition to the reading and study of *Gulliver's Travels.*

After students complete the assigned reading (I ask my students to read all four journeys) and we have talked about Swift's use of satire, I show the Woody Allen film *Sleeper.* I ask students to look for parallels between Swift's and Allen's satire and to consider the following points while they watch the movie.

> What particular people, events, issues, and attitudes does Allen satirize? How and why are they made to look ridiculous? Are there universal elements in these particulars?
>
> How does the protagonist work to advance the satire? Is he consistent throughout the movie?
>
> How does the setting contribute to the satire?
>
> Note recurrent motifs running through the satire. How do they contribute?
>
> What is the director's perspective in all of this? Is the piece didactic?

These are all issues we have already discussed in regard to Swift's work, so students feel comfortable applying them to another work; they generally find comparisons and contrasts fairly easy to identify. The use of these two approaches—beginning by examining cartoons and concluding by drawing comparisons with Allen's film—can help bring a difficult work into clearer perspective for both student and teacher.

*Rosemary Sanini Crawford, The Tatnall School, Wilmington, Delaware*

## Happy Holidays, Oedipus Rex!

My seniors work diligently all year, reading approximately thirty major works and writing countless essays. By December, including their summer assignments, students have read such works as *Hard Times, Madame Bovary, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Oedipus Rex, Antigone, Macbeth, Othello, The Secret Sharer, Heart of Darkness, A Doll's House,* and *A Confederacy of Dunces.* After students have worked so hard, I like to give them one day to look at the lighter side of literature.

Students are puzzled when one day in early December I tell them to bring nothing to class for the next session. They are even more surprised when they come to class and find me setting out glue, construction paper, scissors, colored pencils, and the fronts of all of the previous year's Christmas cards. (I tear off and keep the signature pages for my current mailing list.)

The assignment is to create a holiday greeting in the persona of one of the characters we have studied. The character need not be a main character. Stu-

dents design a new signature page, using the name of the character to whom the message is addressed and a pertinent holiday greeting.

Some of the resulting messages created by my students are funny; others are touching. A card from one of my classes, illustrated with several squirrels in the snow, was addressed to "My dearest little squirrel" and begged Nora (of *A Doll's House*) to return home where macaroons awaited her. It was, of course, signed by her husband Torvald. Several cards were to or from Emma Bovary (always a favorite with the boys as well as the girls in class). One insightful card pictured a woman on the front with the following message inside: "To Charles (crossed out) Rodolphe (crossed out) Léon: You're the only man I've ever loved. Merry Christmas, Emma."

Even the writing style of Ignatius J. Reilly of *A Confederacy of Dunces* was replicated in his greeting: "Although I detest pictures, I have clothed myself in the red suit, symbolizing Santa Claus, to show you all that I have recorded and graphed your behaviors. And due to the notion that you expect something—you will get nothing. Ignatius."

These clever holiday greetings have become a tradition that other teachers and even the principal seem to enjoy reading. My seniors enjoy regressing to a cut-and-paste activity for one day, and the activity serves as an informal review of characters in the books we have read. When students have completed and shared their "character cards," we post the cards on a bulletin board for display.

*Judith B. Marchman, Jonesboro Senior High School, Jonesboro, Georgia*

## Setting Up Sense Centers

I have always been a bit envious of the home economics, art, and industrial arts classes because of their numerous opportunities for hands-on participation. After years of assigning my junior high students to read an autobiography or biography, I finally came up with a more creative approach.

The students selected a biography or autobiography and, as they read the book, created appropriate "sense centers" to recreate some of the experiences described in the book. On the day of the presentation, the class separated into small groups and took tums moving from center to center.

In the case of a Katherine Hepburn autobiography, students set up four centers. Groups had fifteen minutes to spend at each center. In the first center, students watched a clip from one of Hepburn's films. The next center found them sampling chocolates because Hepburn's autobiography related that she loved chocolates. The third center was a listening center where students could listen to an overview of the autobiography, and the final sense center was a collection of photos and quotations.

Other books we read lent themselves to different sense centers, but all centers were alike in one way—each required students' ingenuity in the presentation of important experiences and personal traits selected from the book.

*Sandra Hively Swartz, Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota*

## Reading Aloud Is for Kids

"I Love Literature" is the slogan on a button I often wear to school. Not only do I love reading silently, but I enjoy reading aloud. I like to encourage students to read aloud, also. This is an effective method I have used for several years in my short story class.

First, I collect all the children's books that I have lying around the house. Thanks to my three children, I have an abundant supply. If you don't have such books at your fingertips, ask a friend who has children if you could borrow an assortment of books for a week or two.

On the first day of the activity, my students and I discuss the stories they enjoyed as children. I ask who read them stories and whether there were any family traditions surrounding storytime, such as reading at bedtime, acting out parts of the stories, or reading together in a certain chair. We go on to discuss students' future role as parents and what kinds of books they will want to read to their children.

I then read aloud Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (Harper and Row, 1984). We talk about the mood, tone, and facial expressions used while reading aloud. We also discuss the format of this particular book, the pictures, the type, the white space, and so on, until we have established its overall effect and understand why it lends itself to being read aloud.

On the second day, I give students a chance to explore the selection of books I have assembled. Students select a book apiece, and then form groups of three or four. Each group reviews the selections, makes critical comments on each book, and chooses one book to work with. Each group member reads the book aloud to his or her group. The groups then select the person from their group who they think gave the best presentation and designate this person the reader for the group.

The third class meeting is a read-aloud session. The designated students read their books aloud to the whole class. Afterwards, students discuss the readings and the individual books, considering many of the same questions posed in the earlier discussion of *Where the Wild Things Are*.

One of the benefits of this activity is that students are able to discuss the books and read them aloud without feeling intimidated. Each student gains practice in reading aloud. Students also get an idea of what children's books are currently available and what makes a good story.

In the assortment of books I provide students, I like to include *The Wild Baby* by Barbro Lindgren (translated from the Swedish by Jack Prelutsky, Greenwillow Books, 1981), *There's No Such Thing as a Dragon* by Jack Kent (Western Publishing Co., 1975), and any of Mercer Mayer's books, including *What Do You Do with a Kangaroo?* (Scholastic, 1975). Among my students, another popular book for reading aloud has been *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura J. Numeroff (Harper and Row, 1985).

*Mary Loughead Pokorny, South Iron R-I, Annapolis, Missouri*

## Customized Classics

Encouraging freshmen to perform to their ability during the last weeks of school in June is often difficult. Over the past few years I have perfected a fun-filled activity that is creative, motivating, and challenging.

Students spend one class period discussing all the year's literary experiences. In our case, this includes *Bless the Beasts and the Children, The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, A Separate Peace, The Odyssey, The Andromeda Strain, Romeo and Juliet, Great Expectations, Oedipus, A Raisin in the Sun,* and *Never Cry Wolf.* These conversations usually are refreshers of the early fall's study, and cover who's who, what happened, and where; students also talk about their likes and dislikes among the reading assignments.

Finally, I intervene and ask the class to turn its attention in another direction; I ask students what kinds of changes they might like to see in the plays and novels we have read. Such changes could include a variety of imaginative treatments different from the originals—different turns of events; a tragedy becoming a comedy or vice versa; a new romantic ending; a main character having a change of heart in the middle of an important scene; and so on. With the assignment that follows, I give students the opportunity to make these literary dreams come true. In script form, students are to create, produce, rehearse, and perform a full off-off-off-Broadway production of their customized literary masterpieces.

Students select their own groups, each with a maximum of six participants, and brainstorm their project. I encourage students to keep ideas private (to heighten the suspense). With no two groups using the same work of literature, a basic plot for a script is planned by each group. It is at this point that I introduce some sample videotapes from last year's classes to give students an idea of what can be done. The awareness that they, too, will be videotaped helps motivate students to do their best.

After brainstorming, students meet for the next seven class periods in the auditorium; students can spread out, be as loud as they need to be, and test out

staging possibilities while they work. The guideline for length is that each group is allowed two minutes multiplied by the number of students in the group.

By the end of seven days, students must finish writing their scripts. They then have several more days to rehearse, edit, revise, and time their final product. With the script in almost final form, students can begin working on props. (My students made some of their own and borrowed others from the theater department.) Final touches include lighting, costumes, music, and playbills.

Performances will probably need to be limited to two per class period to allow time for set-up, tear-down, student reactions, and teacher evaluation. Some past award winners among my students' projects include a '60s musical version of *Romeo and Juliet*, a *Ghostbusters*' version of *The Andromeda Strain*, "The Bedwetters' Revenge" (*Bless the Beasts and the Children*), "The Odyssey: A Sort of Musical Comedy," "The Youngers Visit the People's Court" (*A Raisin in the Sun*), "Losers in Lit" (Miss Havisham, Oedipus, and Tybalt meet in a bar), and "Murder They Wrote" (a cast of characters for a whodunit).

*Ronald S. Piro, Wheaton North High School, Wheaton, Illinois*

## Living Literature Museum

A Living Literature Museum involves students in researching a topic, creating a costume and a set, and becoming an author or fictional character for a day. This idea was adapted from *Reading and Writing: The Creative Whole Language Process* (Rosmann Publishing House, 1988). The directions for students are quite simple:

1. Choose an author or literary character whom you admire. Write your name and your author's or character's name on the sign-up sheet. No two students should choose the same person.
2. Research this person and write a one- or two-page report, including details about this person's life and personality.
3. Choose an event from this person's life to depict. Keep the scene simple and consider what props are necessary. Plan where you will stand, how you will pose, and what you will wear.
4. You will have several days to complete the set, costume, and other details. A dress rehearsal is essential to check lighting, costumes, poses, and possible adaptations of the material.

Students must understand that in a museum, *nothing moves*. This includes eyes, hands, and feet. Breaks will need to be scheduled, as students will tire

quickly of standing still. I encourage students to keep their ideas very simple. We use special lighting to set each student apart from the others, and a background of classical music gives the museum a relaxed atmosphere. When students are ready for their presentations, other classroom teachers sign up to take their classes on a trip to the "literature museum."

This activity appeals to everyone; every student who participates can be successful, and the students who tour the museum have a chance to refresh their knowledge of famous authors and literary characters.

*Muriel Rosmann, Arizona Department of Education, Phoenix, Arizona*

## Applying Irony

When I discovered that my ninth-grade English students were having difficulty recognizing irony in literature, I designed a writing assignment which not only helped them understand irony, but proved to be a lot of fun as well.

We first read several definitions of irony. A simplified definition appropriate for this activity is that irony is a contrast between what is expected to happen and what actually does happen. We then applied this definition to Stephen Crane's story, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," which we had read the day before, noting that what was expected to happen—the man with the gun would win the duel—gave way to the unexpected—the unarmed man wins.

I then distributed descriptions of five potentially ironic situations. I asked students to write a vignette of three to five sentences for each situation, developing a sense of irony through the use of the unexpected.

Here are the five situations I presented. After each scenario, I have included one or two sample student responses (shortened to save space).

1. Fearful Fred

   Fearful Fred is afraid to fly. He wants to visit his friends in San Francisco, but is so afraid to fly that he chooses another means of transportation, even though it will take longer.

   Sample responses:

   On his way to San Francisco, Fred is distracted as he looks up and sees the plane he would have taken. He loses control of his car and plows into a telephone pole.

   Fred takes a bus to San Franscisco. The plane, meanwhile, suffers engine failure and crashes into the bus.

2. Timid Timothy

   There has been a rash of burglaries in his neighborhood, so Timid Timothy decides to go to a seminar on "How to Burglar-proof Your House."

   Sample responses:

   Timothy returns home from the seminar only to see a burglar climbing over his back fence, strewing valuables in his hasty escape.

   Timothy installs a state-of-the-art home security system only to return home one day to find that his *house* has been stolen.

3. Renegade Randy

   Twelfth-grader Renegade Randy decides he wants to take an early vacation and tries to get kicked out of school. But no matter how hard he tries, he is not successful.

   Sample response:

   Randy picks a fight with a student who has just stolen a wallet. The wallet falls out of his opponent's pocket and Randy is regarded as a hero for exposing the thief.

4. Psychic Sally

   Psychic Sally believes the earthquake predictions she's been reading in the newspaper and fears the "Big One" is about to happen. She moves out of her 35th-floor apartment into a one-story apartment building.

   Sample responses:

   On the day of the earthquake, the high-rise stands, but the earth opens up and swallows the apartment building.

   The 35-story high-rise falls over on the one-story apartment building, killing all the occupants.

5. Barney the Bum

   Barney is tired of life on the streets. He tries to get arrested, hoping to land in jail where he'll get a hot meal and a warm place to sleep. But try as he might, his efforts are thwarted. (I borrowed this theme from O. Henry's story, "The Cop and the Anthem." We later read this story and students had a chance to measure their stories against O. Henry's.)

   Sample responses:

   Barney breaks into a house he perceives to be unoccupied. He startles the woman living there, but she is lonely and invites him to dinner.

   Barney tries to steal a purse from a small elderly woman. She turns out to be a black belt karate instructor. She beats him up and then convinces him to enroll in her martial arts class.

As a follow-up activity, we read several short stories based on ironic situations and discuss what elements in each story help create a sense of irony. Here is a sampling: "The Diamond Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant; "A Mother in Mannville" by Marjorie Rawlings; "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson; "The Carnival" by Michael Fedo; "Rope" by Katherine Anne Porter; "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury; "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" by Nathaniel Hawthorne; "The Monkey's Paw" by William Wymark Jacobs; "The Azaleas Were a Bargain" by Mary Z. Gray; and "The Last Leaf," "Gift of the Magi," and "The Cop and the Anthem" by O. Henry.

*Jeanette Corkery, Jackson Alternative School, Medford, Oregon*

## Students Connect with Literature

After my students read Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," I ask them to write their own reflection papers. We first talk about how Wordsworth recalls and reflects upon the scenes he describes and how much these scenes have meant to him in his memories throughout the years. I ask the students to reflect on a place in their past—elementary school, grandmother's house, a tree house, or a special childhood hiding place. I want them to remember the place and the feelings that were associated with it.

Then I ask students to return to that place, either in memory or physically, and to explore in writing what they feel on this return. Their reflection papers afford students the opportunity to identify more closely with what Wordsworth felt, and to understand the inspiration of a scene in memory. Students experience, I hope, Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility."

*Carolyn Phipps, Oakhaven High School, Memphis, Tennessee*

## *Dandelion Wine:* Discussion Topic Potpourri

Many students come to my class as Ray Bradbury fans, having read *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Martian Chronicles*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. But rarely have they read my favorite Bradbury book, *Dandelion Wine*.

Teaching a stimulating book like this is, to me, what teaching is all about; *Dandelion Wine* prompts thought and discussion on the excitement of being alive and the realization of life's possibilities, the agonizing awareness that death follows life, and the revelation that life is too precious to waste. *Dandelion Wine* fits perfectly into the weeks following spring break; it's a true celebration of summer, and thus makes a good end-of-year motivator.

The chapters aren't numbered or titled, but this episodic book has natural divisions which can be adapted to suit the ability of any group. It can be taught in a week or spread out over several; it might inspire the reader to write a poem celebrating summer's joys or an essay analyzing the effects of machinery on our daily lives. *Dandelion Wine* provides numerous possibilities for discussion and writing to help students assess their values and their lives. Here are just a few for you to consider:

*Suggested Discussion Topics*

1. Discuss how Douglas Spaulding is affected by the two major discoveries he makes during the summer of 1928.
2. Consider the symbolism of the title. Find all references in the book to dandelion wine and relate each to the theme.
3. Consider how all of the episodes in the novel relate to a central theme. Which of the rites and rituals can you compare to traditions in your family? What are some other rites and rituals that are important in your family?
4. Discuss how the children change Mrs. Bentley's views about her past. What had the late Mr. Bentley told her? How do you feel about the way the children treat Mrs. Bentley?
5. Analyze the children's denial of the Lonely One's death.
6. Discuss the significance of Mr. Jonas both as the town's junkman and as Doug's "savior." How does Mr. Jonas's treatment of Doug affect Doug's strategy with his grandmother and her cooking?
7. How do Douglas's actions at the beginning and the end of the book frame the novel? What significance do his actions have?
8. "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Relate this quote by John Lennon to *Dandelion Wine*.

*Large Group Activities*

1. For a change of pace, have students read several segments aloud, reader's theater style. Three thought-provoking episodes to share are the ones about Mrs. Bentley, the Lonely One, and Helen Loomis.
2. Investigate the year 1928. Describe how people dressed and lived and tell what was going on in the world. Relate your findings to the characters and events in Green Town.
3. After reading *Dandelion Wine,* read the play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. Discuss the importance of the rituals of everyday life and Emily Webb's revelations about life. Describe the similarities between Grover's Corner and Green Town.

*Small Group or Individual Activities*

Form small groups to discuss one of the topics listed below. Share your responses and discoveries with the rest of the class.

the relationships among family members (Douglas and Tom, the boys and their parents, the boys and their grandparents, the boys and their great-grandmother)

the rites and revelations Douglas experiences during the summer of 1928

possible rites that Douglas might celebrate in other seasons

research the tarot cards and the meaning of the tarot witch

*Writing Assignments*

1. Trace the maturation of Douglas Spaulding from the first day of summer to the end of the novel. *Don't* give a plot summary.
2. Explain how the setting of Green Town in the summer of 1928 is important to the novel. Show how the book would be different in a different town, year, or season.
3. Rewrite the Lonely One episode from the point of view of the Lonely One.
4. Analyze the effect of the extended family on Douglas Spaulding.
5. Explore the life and death symbolism in the novel.
6. Analyze the effect of machines and progress on people's lives.
7. Write an episode for *Dandelion Wine,* trying to imitate Bradbury's style. Your episode should involve a rite as well as a revelation. Make it

a true celebration of summer, winter, fall, or spring. Use the third-person point of view, colorful descriptions, and vivid figures of speech.

*Penni J. Meyer, Kettering Fairmont High School, Kettering, Ohio*

# 3 Prewriting and Writing

As with most pursuits, one learns to write by writing. The teaching ideas in this section provide the means for students to learn writing from a variety of different angles and for different purposes. Among other ideas, you'll find a strategy in which students use writing for self-discovery, a descriptive-writing session based on real estate ads, an in-house field trip, a project in which students write brochures, a way for middle school students to pass their expertise on to incoming students, and a long-term assignment to read, evaluate, and respond to the work of a newspaper columnist.

## Character Confrontations

Students from seventh to twelfth grade can all benefit from this clever strategy to promote character development and description. In the space of five days, students create a character, plan a meeting between their character and another character, and write a dialogue between the two characters.

To prepare, cut thirty 3″ × 5″ index cards in half. On thirty of the resulting cards, write a descriptive adjective. On the other thirty, write a noun describing a type of person. Use imaginative adjectives and nouns; it will make your students' work more challenging.

Day 1

Have each student take one card from the adjective pile and one from the noun pile. The resulting combination of words gives the student a character to write about, such as "an angry shoe salesman," "a giddy opera star," "a pigheaded mechanic," "a vegetarian heiress," "a love-starved traffic cop," "a debonair older brother," and so on.

After reading their cards, students are to use one side of a sheet of paper to cluster ideas about their character. They include details about physical appearance, mannerisms, values, habits, pets, belongings, wallet contents, place of birth, job or career, education, and anything else they can think of.

Day 2

Students write a one-page character description selecting details from those they have listed. In this description, students involve the character in an action

typical of his or her personality—complaining about a customer (the angry shoe salesman), ordering health food at a fancy restaurant (the vegetarian heiress), or trying to get a date with a young woman driving by (the love-starved traffic cop).

Ask students to avoid simply listing characteristics to describe their characters and to try to use active verbs rather than the verb *to be*. For instance, "she frowned dourly" makes a stronger statement than "she was dour."

Day 3

Students spend the third day reading their characterizations aloud to the class.

Day 4

Finally, students form pairs and think up a situation in which their characters "meet" and talk to each other. Sample locations might include a bus stop, a grocery store, an airplane flight, or a hospital. Since the two students in a pair may have characters that are very different from each other, the students will need to use ingenuity in devising a believable meeting for their characters.

Next, the students in each pair work together to write a one-page dialogue between their two characters. I ask students to consider the characters' ages, backgrounds, and personalities and to use appropriate diction and vocabulary for each character. At this point, students may need a quick review of the use of punctuation with dialogue.

Day 5

Pairs of students take parts and read their dialogues aloud for the class. Students may introduce their dialogues with a brief description of the characters (the audience should remember the characters from Day 3) and of the setting.

This activity is productive either by itself or as a warm-up to story writing. If necessary, the steps above could be adapted to take less class time.

*Pamela J. Orth, San Luis Obispo High School, San Luis Obispo, California*

## Trilets: Teaching Word Painting

I love to teach poetry. A type of "finger exercise" I have developed for crisp, clear, poetic expression is what I call the trilet. In the prewriting stage, I introduce a few of the poet's tools, such as simile, metaphor, personification, and alliteration. After the students understand these devices, I have them practice using them by writing trilets.

The trilet is an easy poem to write. Each line is based upon a multiple of three, and there are three unrhymed lines. The syllable count is three syllables in the first line, six syllables in the second line, and nine syllables in the third line.

The trilet usually relates to some aspect of nature, although that is not a requirement, as you will see by the examples below. I encourage students to experiment with language to "paint" a word picture so that the reader will see what they saw, feel what they felt, smell what they smelled, and so on. Because of the restrictions of the syllable count, conciseness becomes essential. Less is truly more. I urge my young poets to put "the right words in the right order." I want them to create lasting images that linger long after the trilet is read.

Here are some trilets I wrote as an example for my students:

*Autumn*
Kentucky
Hills flame with God's fall fire—
Such awesome, bold beauty—Who can doubt?

*Winter*
Icicles
Hang like crystal candles
Until the warm sun melts them away.

*Spring*
A daisy,
In radiant beauty,
Sways gently, perfuming the May air.

*Jealousy*
With wild eyes
I stare as my true love
Warmly embraces another man.

*Anger*
Like lava
Flows my blood through cold veins,
As my cheeks turn scarlet with raw rage.

*Winter*
Like diamonds
Glistening snowflakes fall,
Covering the dull earth with white wealth.

*Ken Spurlock, Holmes Senior High School, Covington, Kentucky*

## Adopt a Newspaper Column

Assigning students to adopt an editorial column in the newspaper can be a dandy way to enrich a nonfiction unit. This activity raises interest in current affairs and gives students a sense of involvement in issues that concern them.

I give students these instructions:

> During a six- to eight-week period, read and keep a file of newspaper columns written by one columnist. Label each column with the date and source and, on a separate sheet, write a brief summary of the main points made in each. Also record the date and topic of the column.

After students have read and collected columns for six to eight weeks, the next step is for them to compose and mail a letter to the columnist. The class first brainstorms the types of questions one might address to a columnist. Then students are allowed several days to compose, edit, revise, and recopy their letters in order to present themselves effectively. Students are responsible for obtaining the correct mailing addresses.

Finally, students will begin receiving answers to their letters. Students should be advised that many columnists are too busy to respond to all the mail they receive. Still, when my class did this project, students received some interesting replies. One student asked a columnist, "What do you think is the biggest problem facing the world, and do you have any ideas on solving it?" and soon found a *Boston Globe* column addressed to her!

After sharing their responses in class, my students posted them on a hall bulletin board for the rest of the school to read.

*Gloria D. Legvold, Nashoba Brooks School, Concord, Massachusetts*

## Focus on the Community: Creating a Brochure

An activity that has worked well for me is having students create their own original brochures about the area in which we live. I introduce the brochure assignment after we have covered the tools of persuasion.

### Prewriting

I give the students copies of brochures on a variety of attractions. Such brochures are easily obtainable from state tourism bureaus, or they may be found at rest areas along the interstate. Many gas stations and motels also offer the kinds of materials that I hand out. The class then discusses in small groups the strong and weak points of the brochures, and the students decide what kind of audience each is geared toward.

Then the class brainstorms as a whole, trying to list all the area attractions that visitors might be interested in seeing. Since the northern Kentucky area has many such spots, this list can become quite long. I tell the students to think not just about the obvious, but to try to come up with some of the more out-of-the-way places that might appeal to either a tourist or to someone who is considering relocation. From the list generated by the brainstorming, I ask

the students to separate the attractions into two to four categories. The following day the class shares its ideas for a few minutes at the beginning of the period.

Writing

With the prewriting activities completed, the students write their own original copy for a local brochure, using all the tools of persuasion that we covered in our earlier unit and as many of the area attractions they feel are appropriate. I stress that the brochure should have an introduction to the area as a whole, a few body paragraphs about some of the best spots, and a strong conclusion.

Rewriting

Once the written version is completed, I separate the students into groups of four or five, where they work on peer feedback and evaluation, checking the copy for organization, original use of language, and persuasive techniques. Using this feedback, the students then revise and rewrite their copy for a grade.

Publishing

After I return the graded copy, students still have one more task. I hand out the professionally produced brochures for a second time, and the class examines them for ideas about layout and design. Using artwork, photos, and possibly maps, along with their copy, typed to fit the chosen column width, the students lay out an actual brochure. The best finished products then are displayed in the classroom and may eventually find their way into the community. I have also considered having a class contest for the best brochure and forwarding each class winner to the Florence City Council or to the county commissioners for additional student recognition.

Students enjoy learning to look at their community in a new way. Some may discover for the first time that northern Kentucky has a great deal to offer tourists or prospective homeowners. That discovery, in itself, is enough to make this project one of my favorites.

*Sue Spurlock, Boone County High School, Florence, Kentucky*

## Middle School Experts

Students entering a departmentalized middle school from an elementary school with self-contained classrooms have a big adjustment to make. Those of us who teach first-year middle school students realize the importance of a smooth transition from elementary to middle school in overall student success. As part of an orientation program, I developed an activity for my language arts students in which they serve as advisors to incoming elementary students.

I begin by telling my students that they are experts about what it is like to be a student in our middle school. The class brainstorms by listing on the chalkboard everything that they would want to tell an incoming student about our school. We then categorize items on our list. This leads to further discussions in which students elaborate on their comments. This process can usually be accomplished in one fifty-minute class period.

Next, students use their brainstorming lists to prepare written advice that will ultimately be read by incoming students. Students may opt to work alone, in pairs, or in groups of three. The individual, pair, or group chooses a writing format: questions and answers, several paragraphs of prose, or an advice column. I allow one class period for writing.

During the following class period, students meet with other individuals or groups to read their papers. Corrections, additions, and deletions are made on the original draft. This can be done in about thirty minutes. Students then write a final draft, proofread with a second individual or group, and hand in their papers.

After I have read the papers and made comments, I make a predetermined number of photocopies of each writing. (This could include enough copies for individuals in one or more classes, or only enough for a "class copy" for one or more classes.) Then the class determines a logical order for the writings and arranges each set of writings in this order. Students design covers for the booklets, fasten the pages inside, and present these booklets—"Advice from the Experts"—to the members of the incoming class or classes.

*Susan Sorensen, Spooner Middle School, Spooner, Wisconsin*

## Intensive Character Building

Character building in creative writing classes presents unique problems for students; they often forget that characters are more than mere physical beings. To stimulate students' minds to think beyond the obvious, I have tried the following assignment. Using a series of pictures which are, in themselves, characterizations (I use *The Family of Man,* a collection of photographic character studies created by Edward Steinchen for and published by the Museum of Modem Art in New York), I give each student a page with several pictures on it. I ask students to identify a character whom they would like to get to know, to study that character for several minutes, perhaps to give that character a name, and to feel comfortable with that character. If they do not find someone appealing on their page, they may opt for another sheet. After several "get acquainted" moments, students to write a detailed, one-paragraph physical description of their character, using a thesaurus if necessary. I allow plenty of time for this step and the next two.

The next day's task becomes more difficult, for I remind students that a character is more than just a physical form. Therefore, he or she must act and move in a certain manner. These behavioral patterns become a further indication of the character's total persona. I ask these kinds of questions:

How does the character walk?
Does he or she shuffle? lumber? strut?
How does the character react to his or her world?
Does he or she dream? respond suddenly? hesitate?
How does the character talk?

Students soon discover that character development includes actions and reactions. They then write a paragraph in which their chosen character displays actions which ultimately indicate character. The photographs allow many interpretations, so student writers have a great deal of flexibility in choosing actions for their characters.

On the last day of this project, students are told that they will tackle the most difficult task of all three. This time they must create their character by describing his or her setting, for characters are also products of their environments. I remind them of Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, but there are many other examples from which to choose. Students then write a paragraph which depicts the character in a particular setting, paying careful attention to the details that add to the reader's understanding of the character. Then, for the culminating writing project, students either incorporate the three paragraphs into one or create a three-paragraph composite—a multidimensional characterization—of their character. The results are impressive, and by now students have realized that character creation is both a difficult and a rewarding experience. Furthermore, these early explorations in character development often become parts of larger, more sophisticated works such as short stories or novels.

*Jean Whiteman, Glenbard West High School, Glen Ellyn, Illinois*

### Students Put Themselves in Midas's Shoes

As part of a unit in World Literature, my students read and discussed "The Story of Midas" from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. They then took part in the following writing assignment:

1. Make a list of problems, wishes, things that bother you, and things about your life that you wish you could change. Choose the one that you would most like changed.
2. Now envision a "god" or "goddess" with the power to solve this difficulty. Write a detailed physical description of this god or goddess.

3. Write a story in which the main character, representing you, requests and receives a favor from the deity you have invented. The favor is to solve the problem chosen in #1.
4. Describe the "honeymoon" period in which your character enjoys the benefits of this problem-solving boon.
5. Develop the plot to its logical turning point when the favor creates a bigger problem than the one it was meant to solve.
6. Choose the outcome: either your character can go back, as Midas did, to the god or goddess for a remission or you can insist that your character face the unfortunate consequences of his or her request.

The students' response to this writing experience was so positive that we decided to publish a booklet of their stories.

*Mary C. Hills, Millard North High School, Omaha, Nebraska*

## Creating Characters So Real That They Pay Taxes

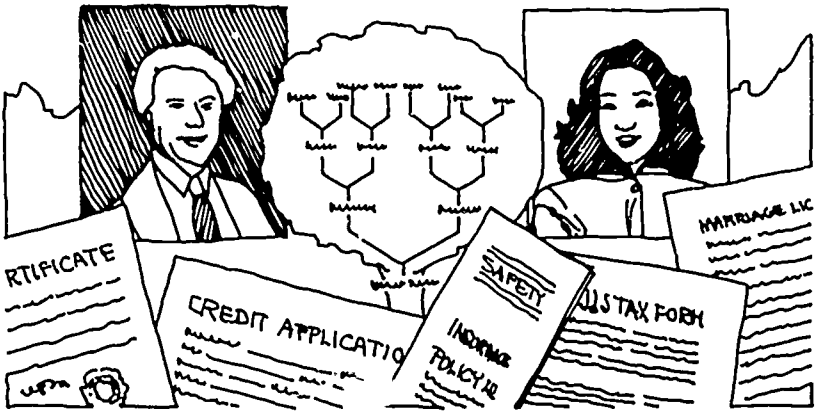
Here's character development in serious fashion. In this approach, students' invented characters achieve a sense of realism through students' use of birth certificates, family trees, applications for credit cards, and assorted other documents. The forms used are authentic, and as students create their characters, they also become familiar with documents that they will be filling out in earnest at some point in the future.

To begin, I provide each student with a packet containing some or all of the following forms: a birth certificate, a family tree, an application for a driver's license, applications for loans and credit cards, a marriage license, applications to schools and to the armed services, an apartment lease, an accident report, a tax form, and a death certificate.

Students choose their characters from magazine pictures I provide. They then develop physical and psychological portraits and personal histories for their characters, filling out the appropriate forms as they go along. The forms require students to be specific and detailed, and help students create the outline of an identity. The written portrait includes more personal information such as habits, likes and dislikes, personality traits, strengths and weaknesses, and details about past and current life events. The forms and all written materials are placed in a character folder.

To make students' characters truly come alive, I then ask students to write a short story featuring their character. The story is to be based on one or more incidents suggested by the material in the character's folder. At the first draft stage, I usually confer one-on-one with students, praising details that help make the character seem real and pointing out any inconsistencies between the character description and the information in the folder.

During further revisions, students consult with their peers and incorporate their peers' suggestions into their stories. When the authors are happy with their work, they may read their stories aloud to the class or make them available to their classmates on a table reserved for students' writings.




This prewriting emphasis on the characters' backgrounds has definite results. When students turn to story writing, they are more likely to develop their characters thoroughly and with vivid details. After giving their characters birth certificates, family trees, marriage licenses, and apartment leases, students may find it hard to remember that these are only fictional people after all!

*Debby Rice, Coconino High School, Flagstaff, Arizona*

## An In-House Field Trip

Having been in the classroom sixteen years now, I have to admit to periods of teacher burnout, as do most of us who have creative writing assignments to design, daily papers to grade, lesson plans to write, competencies to record, and innumerable other tasks that go along with being an English teacher.

One day, knowing that I had little time or stamina to put a totally new unit plan together, I brainstormed, "What would I like to do if I were a sophomore coming to an English class?" I wanted to come up with a strategy that would be acceptable to the administration, a valid teaching method in my mind, and still something that students would find inviting.

I thought about my students' need for movement; they seemed to do best when they could be out of their seats, moving around and talking. I was sure

*they* would think they could do even better if they were out of the classroom altogether. . . .With this thought in mind, I considered where we could go or what we could do. A field trip sounded like the right answer, but I was put off by the time and money involved. Then I looked at the same idea from a different angle . . . and came up with an idea for a combination in-house field trip/writing assignment.

The assignment I planned involved the gathering, organizing, and implementing of details for a paper. I first introduced techniques for gathering and organizing details through worksheets, the overhead projector, discussion, and some practice sessions. Quick calls to the head custodian, the chairperson of the drama department, and the head cook followed; I was able to set up appointments with them for small groups of students to travel on their own to various "mysterious and uninhabited locations" within our own building. Students' curiosity was piqued when they learned that they would be visiting the "secret tunnel" underlying the school building, the freezers, the loading docks, the prop room, and would even be riding the school's small creaky supply elevator.

I made it clear to students before their trips that they were to note at least twenty-five details; these would be included in descriptive papers that they would write following their field trip. In addition, I stressed that, because *I* had never seen any of the locations that they would be visiting, they would need to organize their descriptive details well, so that I could picture the scene just as if I had been there. "Left," "directly above," "straight ahead," and other specific details would all be important in their papers.

Sending my students—who were normally unmotivated to notice detail—on this field trip turned out to be one of the most successful prewriting endeavors I have ever used. Most students came back with far more than twenty-five details. Written descriptions varied from the basics to those with creative use of voice, as can be seen in the following examples of student work:

> I walked down twelve black mesh steps into a tunnel lined on the left with nine half-inch copper tubes.
>
> . . . a small handmade wheelbarrow loaded with green tissue paper lettuce leaves . . . eighteen dusty 1955 athletic trophies . . . a retired urinal . . . a 'Don't feed the animals' sign in front of a concrete wall—the only way to go was a dark left. (It made me wonder what animals were beyond.)
>
> From the moment I saw it (the tunnel), I was on guard not to bump even one thing because it would fall over, hit the next piece of junk, and there would be a tremendous domino effect.
>
> There they were on my left—four fans you teachers had been begging for on those hot fall days.

Not only did students write, but afterwards, they compared the various writings about each location and discussed why there was disagreement among them, focusing on what had been left out or not stated clearly enough in each description. Students were proud of their descriptions and tended to defend their inclusion or exclusion of certain details.

This assignment turned out to be a valuable motivator for writing for the rest of the year; even students who had done very little before this point continued to take more of an interest in descriptive detail and clear expression.

*Janelle Busdeker, Findlay High School, Findlay, Ohio*

### Portraits of Fictional Families

This writing project has been very successful with my middle school students. In inventing a family in all its facets, students are able to be creative while employing a variety of writing skills. Students of average ability can complete the work outside of class in about two weeks. Skills-level students may do most of their writing in class so that the teacher can provide assistance.

On the first day, I introduce the project to the students. After I give a general overview of each section of the project, I let students look through magazines for pictures to use as portraits of their "family." I provide a variety of magazines to get everyone started; the next day, students may bring in magazines from home if they like. I also supply glue, scissors, construction paper, tape, and felt-tip pens. If students are working on the project in class, I supply writing folders.

At the beginning stage, while students are assembling the "family portraits," students talk, laugh, and discuss their choices. I suggest that students complete the "Family Character Profile" next. The remaining steps of the assignment, which require a bit more concentration, may then be completed in any order. To ensure that progress is being made, I assign due dates every few days.

Students are expected to complete a rough draft before they write a final copy. Each section should be written on a separate piece of paper. As they work, students read sections of each other's projects and offer suggestions. I circulate around the class and do the same. Students can be as creative as they wish, embellishing and enriching each section with their own ideas and illustrations. Students create a cover for their project and the final copies are assembled and stapled.

As students work on the details, these invented families come alive. I tell students that they are free to structure the family unit as they like. As a result, in addition to families containing a mother, father, children, and pets, I have read about underwater families, outer-space families, medieval families, all-

female families, and all-senior-citizen families. I always provide time for students to read each other's finished projects because most students are delighted with their invented families and want to share them.

*Family Portrait:* Cut out four pictures from a magazine to form a hypothetical family unit. The structure of the four-member family need not consist of a father, mother, and children, although that is one option. Paste or glue the pictures to an 8 1/2" × 11" sheet of construction paper. Underneath each picture, print the full name of each family member.

*Character Profile:* Write a character description for each member of the family. This should be done in paragraph form. Include as many specific details about each character as possible. You may include such details as time and place of birth, age, occupation, travel experiences, education, personality traits, physical characteristics, unusual experiences, habits, relationships with other members of the family, strongest quality, goal in life, secret desire, and anything else that you want to include.

*Family Home:* Find a picture of some type of dwelling that represents the family home. Cut out the picture and paste it to a sheet of construction paper. Below the picture, draw a floor plan of the dwelling. Be sure to label rooms. Also, write a paragraph describing where the dwelling is located and the surrounding area.

*Community:* Write a description of the community in which your family lives. You could have them live anywhere—in a rural, urban, or suburban setting. Include in your description such things as the name of the town, its location, recreation facilities, businesses, theaters, churches, and so on. (An almanac or telephone book might give you some ideas.)

*Family Relationships:* Write a one-page dialogue between two members of the family. Don't use "play form"; use quotation marks. The dialogue could concern one of the following:

an argument or conflict about anything
plans for a trip or vacation
keeping a secret
politics
something current in the news
two family members discussing a problem of a third member
a strange, unusual, or funny event in the family.

*More Family Relationships:* Write diary entries for seven days from the point of view of one member of the family. Have the person comment on his or her own thoughts and feelings and on the lives, experiences,

and attitudes of family members and friends. Reveal a secret or make a confession in one of the entries.

*Family Business Letters:* Look through a mail-order catalog or a magazine that contains ads for mail-order items Write a letter from the point of view of one member of your family, sending away for one of these items. Follow the correct form for a business letter.

*Family Holiday:* Write a paragraph describing a memorable family holiday, such as a birthday, Thanksgiving, or Fourth of July. Describe how the family traditionally spends this holiday, which foods are eaten, which games are played, which decorations are displayed on this day, and so on. Also, explain why this particular holiday was memorable. Did something special or unusual happen?

*Family Work:* How do members of this family earn a living? Write a detailed description of the work done by various members of the family. You may include work inside and outside of the home.

*Family* ————: This section is left up to your imagination. Include whatever you want to write about the family that you have created. Some ideas are listed below:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Religion | Daily lives | Music | Transportation |
| Problems | Relatives | Games | Vacations |
| Pets | Chores | Clothing | Meals, snacks |
| Hobbies | Nicknames | | |

*Lois W. Goelz, Oregon Middle School, Medford, New York*

### Writing a Handbook for Parents

This handbook idea has been adapted many times for various student groups. It comes originally from Roselle Holmes of Clarke Central High School. The purpose is for students to create a booklet of dos and don'ts for parents. Students get involved in thinking and talking about parenthood, organizing lists, describing a childhood experience, and using imagination to create a fictional child of their own. The prewriting prompts may be as varied as the teacher and the students need. A reading selection that focuses on the differences of viewpoint between adults and teenagers could be used as the prewriting activity for the entire project, or a different prompt could be used before each section of the handbook. Brainstorming could help students get ideas, as could discussions of child-parent relations in books, stories, or popular television programs. For the dedication page, students may spend time in the library examining the format of dedications in other books.

The following are some of the possible tasks that can accompany a handbook project. Students will appreciate having some leeway in choosing tasks. Of the eight tasks listed below, students might be asked to complete at least five, and to complete more if they are interested.

1. Cover—Design and make a fancy cover for your handbook. Include a title and your name as author.
2. Dedication page—Write a dedication page for your handbook. Include a quotation about children or young people, parenting, growing up, or living happily. Document the source of the quotation (give the author's name and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken).
3. Dos for parents—Make a list of all the things you would try to do as a parent.
4. Don'ts for parents—Make a list of all the things you would try *not* to do as a parent.
5. Sketch of the "ideal parent"—Draw a picture of the ideal parent. Your drawing may be humorous or serious. Add an explanatory caption.
6. Sketch of the "real parent"—Draw a humorous or serious picture of your real parent or guardian. Add an explanatory caption.
7. Description of a childhood memory—Write a composition about an important experience from your childhood.
8. Description of your fictional child or children—Imagine yourself in the future as a parent. Write a composition describing the appearance, behavior, and temperament of your child or children. You might want to include references to traits inherited from both parents (you and your future spouse) and to include details about how growing up will be different for your child or children in the future than it was for you.

*Carol Young, Clarke County School District, Athens, Georgia*

### Letters to VIPs

How would the soccer player in your third-period composition class react to receiving an autographed 8″ × 10″ glossy of Edson Arantes Do Nascimento? That is exactly what one of my students found in his mailbox last spring. Derek has long admired this Brazilian soccer star, who is better known as Pélé. When I made an assignment requiring students to write a letter to a celebrity, it turned out to be a very rewarding experience for Derek. Unfortunately, the assignment didn't come with any guarantees. Not every student who wrote to a superstar received a reply. Everyone did, however, gain valu-

able experience in using the Readers' Guide To Periodical Literature, reading and taking notes, and incorporating research into a letter intended for a real and valued audience.

I suggested that students use the following resources: the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature,* current magazines indexed in the *Readers' Guide,* and *The Address Book: How to Reach Anyone Who's Anyone* by Michael Levine.

To introduce this activity, have students brainstorm a list of famous people they admire and would like to establish communication with if they could. After working independently for a few minutes, my students are always interested in hearing the names on their classmates' lists. I also participate in this sharing time, reading names from my list and selecting my favorite one to research through the *Readers' Guide.* I then model the procedure for locating material in this valuable index. For many high school students, this instruction is merely review. Often, I role-play the steps involved in the research as the class instructs me.

After everyone has chosen a celebrity, we go to the Learning Resources Center to work on individual research. Students are asked to locate and read at least one article about their chosen celebrity. I require them to record the bibliographical information for each article they read and to make notes from the reading. Students understand that they will be required to refer to these articles and to incorporate at least one quote into the letters they will be mailing. When first drafts of the letters are completed, students revise and edit carefully, aware of the fact that someone important may read their writing.

I provide each student with two envelopes and two postage stamps. This is the only way I can be sure that each letter, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope, will actually make it to the mailbox. Most of my students have been able to find addresses for their celebrity choices in Levine's book. If not, the librarian can sometimes suggest other resources for finding particular addresses. We make quite a ceremony of folding the letters just right, licking the envelopes, and sending them on their way. Then we try to forget about them, usually going on to write a research paper that incorporates some of the research skills we practiced.

The excitement is always renewed when, a month or two later, one of my students comes running into the classroom with a letter or autographed picture. Last year, students at Abilene High School received a picture of Richard Pryor, a letter from Arnold Schwarzenegger, and a note from Henry Cisneros. But I'm still waiting for Kristine to get her reply from Patrick Swayze. You see, Kristine requested two pictures, one for herself and one for her English teacher.

*Gwen Fitzhugh, Abilene High School, Abilene, Texas*

## Real-Estate Writing

Motivating students by showing them real-world uses of descriptive writing has always been a problem for me. I can readily show students examples of narrative, persuasive, and argumentative writings, but I could never find good examples of simple descriptive writing to show them. Then I realized that every day I look at descriptive paragraphs—in the form of real estate ads.

The first thing I do is to read the class many different ads for different types of homes. We then discuss how the language of the ad and the parts of the house described would appeal to particular persons or families. After each ad I ask students, "What kind of person would buy this house?"

The next step has students write a basic description of a house, whether their own, a house they've seen, or an imaginary house that they would like to live in. My emphasis here is not on writing sentences or paragraphs, but on deciding what to include in the description and which descriptive words and phrases to use. In other words, students have to play the role of a real estate agent and evaluate the strengths of their chosen homes.

Students read these lists aloud and the rest of the class suggests what type of person or family might buy each house. Finally, students develop a topic sentence and write a descriptive paragraph about their chosen house. The description should be written while keeping in mind the type of person who would be interested in the home. We read aloud and discuss these descriptions.

This writing activity reinforces good writing habits; students choose their descriptive words carefully, think about what points to emphasize in their description, and keep the audience in mind as they write. The finished products are proof that students have gained a better idea of what constitutes good descriptive writing.

*Thomas Teckman, Fort Loramie High School, Loramie, Ohio*

## Word Play with Opposites

I picked up this activity at a small group session ("Techniques for Teaching Poetry Writing to Students") at an Illinois Association of Teachers of English conference several years ago. I'm not sure of its origin, and have since come across other versions of it, but I find it a very successful prewriting exercise and warm-up to creative writing.

I go through the following steps in class, explaining each as it comes up so that students cannot anticipate the next step.

> Step 1: Write down two words that are opposites of each other. (Examples: young, old; firm, weak; sharp, dull; fire, ice; chaos, order.)

Step 2: Place these words at the top of your paper as the headings for two columns. Write the numbers 1–15 in a descending column below the first word. Write the numbers 1–10 in a descending column below the second word. Then use word association to list fifteen words in the first column and ten words in the second. *Associate only with the immediately preceding word.* Do not use proper names or phrases, only single words.

Example: black

1. tar
2. bubbles
3. bath
4. shower
5. rain

Step 3: Arrange your words into lines of poetry, following these guidelines:

Use 25 of the 27 words. (These include the words at the top of the columns.)

Use each word only once.

Don't add articles, prepositions, or any other words.

Keep your eyes open for possible alliterative combinations of words.

You may add *s*, *es*, or *ed*. This will allow you to change a noun (e.g., *capture*) to a verb form (*captures* or *captured*).

Step 4: Take out 5 of the 25 words.

Step 5: Make any revisions you like, including capitalization, in the arrangement of the remaining 20 words.

To illustrate the process in action, here's a step-by-step example. (I don't show such an example to students because I want them to focus entirely on the choices involved in each step, rather than to look ahead to the results.)

Step 1: freeze, boil

Step 2:

| freeze | boil |
|---|---|
| 1. frigid | 1. erupt |
| 2. block | 2. volcanic |
| 3. stack | 3. ash |
| 4. cards | 4. wood |
| 5. greeting | 5. dead |
| 6. friends | 6. winter |
| 7. support | 7. snow |
| 8. framework | 8. man |
| 9. skeleton | 9. breathe |
| 10. bone | 10. life |

11. ivory
12. ebony
13. glossy
14. photograph
15. capture

Step 3: life stacks cards
frigid bone ivory blocks
skeletal framework man
ebony volcanic ash
freeze photograph
captured winter erupts
snow boils
dead wood breathes
support glossy
(the words *greeting* and *friends* were omitted)

Step 4: Remove *support, glossy, blocks, framework,* and *volcanic.*

Step 5: Life stacks cards—
frigid bone-ivory skeletal Man,
ebony ash.

Freeze photograph.

Captured, Winter erupts,
snow boils,
dead wood breathes.

One advantage of this format is that it requires the use of unconventional sentence structures. There are no articles or connecting words, so images collide in unusual ways, as they do sometimes in poetry. Of course, the results of this exercise are sometimes merely jumbled words, but jumbles can be quite revealing. Although this method may only rarely produce an entire poem that works, it often creates individual lines that convey striking images and fresh word choices. In addition, students gain new perceptions and practice juggling words and punctuation to create meaning. Among my students, favorite lines produced by this activity included "copper beach," "shaking heartbeat," "velvet blood," "cold blue life," "French fry army," and "fire suns, candle moons."

*Connie L. Brubaker, Litchfield High School, Litchfield, Illinois*

### Selling Future Technologies

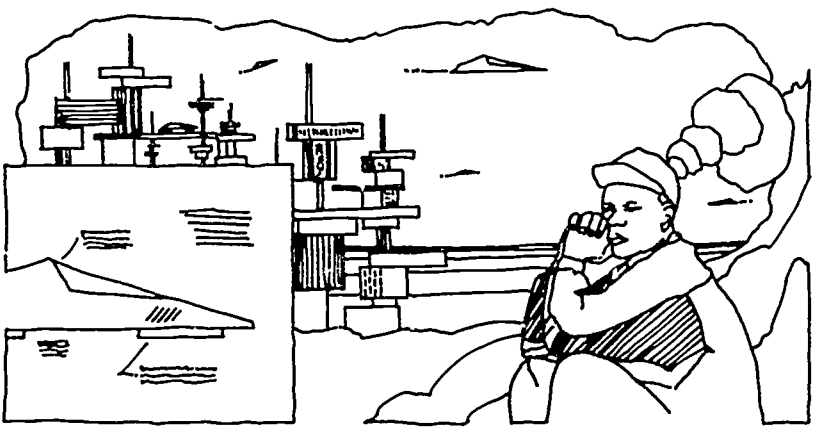
This strategy was inspired in part by the "Robot Project" idea from *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing* by Kirby and Liner (Boynton and Cook, 1981).

After viewing "The Veldt," a film based on the short story by Ray Bradbury, my eighth-grade students are fascinated by the gadgets and conveniences enjoyed by the 21st-century family in the story. To help initiate a discussion about technology and how it affects us, I talk about some of the appliances my students have had all their lives that I, as a youngster, only dreamed about. These include portable hair dryers, calculators, cassette players, VCRs, and so on.

Next, I ask students to describe to the class some of the gadgets they dream about. I ask students to think about new technology relating to transportation, home, school, and recreation. Students consider such questions as "What conveniences do you wish you had to make your life easier, safer, or more productive?" "What problems do you have at school or home that could be solved by technology?"

I list students' ideas on the chalkboard. In their journals, students are to write out possible solutions to the problems posed and to choose one to solve.

Each student then designs an invention to solve the chosen problem and makes a diagram or sketch of it. The student also writes a description of what the invention can do, how it works, its special features, and its potential problems. Interested students may even make models of their inventions.



The final step is for students to "sell" their invention to the class through a short speech or commercial. Students are asked to use their diagram or model in their presentation. After each presentation, the listeners write in their journals the name of each invention, the presenter, and why they would or would not purchase that particular invention. Some of the ideas my students have come up with include built-in springs in tennis shoes for basketball players, money trees, comfortable school desks, and robots that do hair and makeup.

My students enjoyed this project, and I found it an excellent way to combine listening, writing, and speaking.

*Elizabeth A. Rehrauer, New Auburn High School, New Auburn, Wisconsin*

## The Giving Tree

I teach 152 tenth- and eleventh-grade students. As much as I would like to, I can't even begin to think about buying all of them something for the winter holidays. But someone once said that necessity is the mother of invention, so—eureka—the Holiday Mailbag was born.

In early December I place a large construction-paper Christmas tree on one of my bulletin boards. I label the tree "Holiday Mailbag—Do Not Open Until Mail Call." I explain to my students that this is their tree, that I will be writing them all holiday thoughts, and that they in turn can use the same area to "mail" their thoughts to someone in class or to me if the spirit just wallops them.

Slowly the tree fills, growing up and out: a mail carrier's nightmare. One hundred fifty-two notes take quite a while to write; whenever I have a spare minute, I write a note, fold and address it, and staple it to the bulletin board. I concentrate on writing something positive about something I saw a student do or a piece of writing I particularly liked.

When I first started this project, I thought high school students would think they were too cool for it. But they watch the board intensely and I offer a good grilling if their "mail" hasn't been posted yet. They love sending their own mail to others in class.

At the end of class before the holiday break we have mail call. Each year I am amazed at how well my "presents" are received. Often, when seniors come back to have their memory books signed, I see my note tucked in with prom napkins and concert tickets. I am delighted that it can mean so much.

Of course, I get something in the bargain. I save my holiday "mail" in a coffee cup, and review it at the end of a hard day in April or May.

*Victoria M. Bolling, Chavala High School, Seale, Alaska*

## Me: A Middle-School Writing Unit

Middle school students emerge as hormones in tennis shoes—ever-changing, volatile adolescents determined to find themselves. Writing provides a means of discovery for middle schoolers. Any time during the school year would be appropriate to implement this mini-unit on writing, but I prefer the beginning of the year. It gives me a chance to learn more about my students, personally,

and more about their writing abilities, and it gives them an opportunity to write about their favorite subject: themselves.

This unit consists of three assignments:

1. Sole Story—Students trace one of their feet on a piece of construction paper. These feet are cut out and used to compose stories, essays, or poems to describe where the students are going in life. Various methods of prewriting can help students to focus on one ambition, dream, or hope for the future. I display these feet on the walls and ceiling of the classroom so that they look like footsteps walking around the room.
2. "There is a place I know . . ."—The students are asked to describe a real or imaginary place that is special to them. Examples might include their bedroom, their grandmother's house, or a park. Students respond to these questions: What makes it special? When do you go there? Do you go there alone or with others? What does it look like? Again, prewriting activities will help to focus and to provide descriptive words. This can be written on construction or notebook paper with illustrations.
3. "My name is . . ."—If you could change your name, what would it be, and why? Even if you like your name, pretend that you must change it for some reason. (Suppose that you are being pursued by the mob and need to hide your identity.) Would you change your looks to go with your new name? Would you act differently? Would your friends treat you as they do now? Would your personality be the same?

This unit has proved to be invaluable in diagnosing writing problems and gives me a starting point for what needs to be fixed the most. I begin holding conferences at this time to establish student-teacher rapport. I ask that students complete all three assignments, and I give them a grade just for completing all three. Then I allow them to choose one piece for me to grade under the microscope. Through this unit, writing becomes less painful for all students. With the sense of accomplishment they gain, they approach subsequent writing assignments with more confidence.

*Leslie Scarborough, Albright Middle School, Houston, Texas*

### Starring Me

Doesn't everyone want to be a star? "Starring Me" is an assignment that lets students achieve a sense of stardom while they practice using adjectives and illustrating abstract concepts. I adapted this idea from a unit created by the English Department chairperson of my school, Linda Maxwell.

The materials needed are the following:

poster board, one sheet for each student
scissors
glue
felt-tip markers
construction-paper stars in 3 sizes:
  big for positive traits
  medium for average traits
  small for negative traits

I begin by asking students to list thirty or more descriptive words and phrases about themselves. Then, on the appropriate-sized stars, students copy words from their lists. Similar traits may be listed together on the same star. If they like, students may cut out additional stars in varying sizes, using larger for positive traits and smaller for negative traits.

Students then decorate their stars and arrange them on a sheet of poster board.

Each sheet of poster board becomes a "me" poster. The word "me" must appear on the poster, along with the student's name. Students may write or draw their names or may use letters cut from newspapers or magazines. To illustrate the words and phrases appearing on the stars, students may use photographs, pictures from magazines or newspapers, or their own drawings. Students may also use cartoon characters, if they provide dialogue or a caption to show how a particular cartoon character reflects a trait listed.

When the "me" posters are completed, students write a descriptive composition about their personality, working in some of the words and phrases they listed. I encourage students to make their compositions lively and interesting; after all, each student is explaining what makes him or her a "star."

Any students who want to may read their finished writings to the class, using their posters as visual aids. Finally, the writings and posters are displayed in the classroom as an illustration of all the stars who make up our class.

*Verna Clark, Klein Forest High School, Klein ISD, Spring, Texas*

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801



ISBN: 0-8141-22620
ISSN: 1042-5330