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ABSTRACT

Designed to tap the rich collection of instructional techniques in the ERIC database, this compilation of lesson plans offers practical suggestions for developing high school students' writing skills. The 37 lesson plans in this book are divided into four sections: (1) descriptive; (2) audience/voice; (3) expository; and (4) creative. A user's guide, activity chart, and a 22-item annotated bibliography of related sources in the ERIC database are included. (RS)

Writing Exercises for High School Students

by Barbara Vultaggio

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills

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ERIC (an acronym for Educational Resources Information Center) is a national network of 16 clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for building the ERIC database by identifying and abstracting various educational resources, including research reports, curriculum guides, conference papers, journal articles, and government reports. The Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) collects educational information specifically related to reading, English, journalism, speech, and theater at all levels. We also cover interdisciplinary areas, such as media studies, reading and writing technology, mass communication, language arts, critical thinking, literature, and many aspects of literacy.

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TRIED is an acronym for Teaching Resources in the ERIC Database.

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Series Introduction

Dear Teacher,

In this age of the information explosion, we can easily feel overwhelmed by the enormity of material available to us. This is certainly true in the education field. Theories and techniques (both new and recycled) compete for our attention daily. Yet the information piling up on our desks and in our minds is often useless precisely because of its enormous volume—how do we begin to sort out the bits and pieces that are interesting and useful for us?

The TRIED series can help. This series of teaching resources taps the rich collection of instructional techniques collected in the ERIC database. Focusing on specific topics and grade levels, these lesson outlines have been condensed and reorganized from their original sources to offer you a wide but manageable range of practical teaching suggestions, useful ideas, and classroom techniques. We encourage you to refer to the sources in the ERIC database for more comprehensive presentations of the material outlined here.

Besides its role in developing the ERIC database, ERIC/RCS is responsible for synthesizing and analyzing selected information from the database and making it available in printed form. To this end we have developed the TRIED series. The name TRIED reflects the fact that these ideas have been tried by other teachers and are here shared with you for your consideration. We hope that these teaching supplements will also serve for you as a guide, introduction, or reacquaintance to the ERIC system, and to the wealth of material available in this information age.

Carl B. Smith, Director

ERIC/RCS

USER'S GUIDE for Writing Exercises for High School Students *TRIED*

These lessons offer practical suggestions for developing high school students' writing skills. The lessons are divided into the following sections: The Activities Chart (pages vi-vii) indicates the types of activities found in the various lessons such as peer evaluation, community involvement, and research. An annotated bibliography at the end of the book contains references to additional lessons, as well as to resources for teaching writing at the high school level.

LESSON DESIGN

These lessons offer practical ideas that have been gathered from their original source in the ERIC database. The ED numbers for sources in *Resources in Education (RIE)* are included to enable you to go directly to microfiche collections for the complete lesson, or to order the complete document from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). If a lesson has a CS number rather than an ED number, look in *RIE* or the ERIC database to find the corresponding ED number. To order from EDRS, the ED number must be provided.

These lessons have been revised from their sources into a consistent format for your convenience. Each lesson includes the following sections:

Brief Description

Objectives

Procedures

Although the lessons are addressed to you, the teacher, many times the TRIED text addresses the students directly. These student directions are indicated with a pencil. Address these remarks to your students throughout the lesson, if you so choose.

You know your students better than anyone else. Adapt these lessons to the ability levels represented in your classroom. Some of the lessons were specifically written for certain levels but can be modified easily.

Consider these lessons as recommendations from your colleagues who TRIED them and found that they worked well. Try them yourself, modify them, and trust your students to respond with enthusiasm. Students can learn the material better if they use a variety of ways to explore the meaning of the facts and ideas they are studying.

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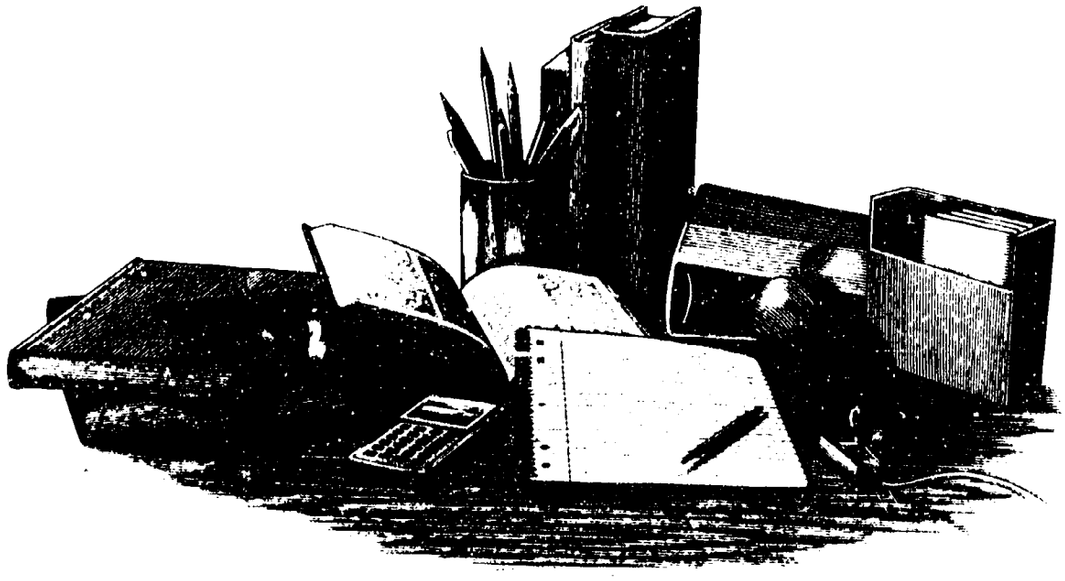
Activities Chart

	Audience/Voice	Class Presentation	Community Involvement	Creative Writing	Description	Dialogue	Documentation	Essay Writing	Exposition	Freewriting	Group Work	Metaphors	Peer Evaluating	Personal Experience	Persuasion	Point of View	Research	Role-Playing	Summarizing
Being Precise (p. 2)	X	X			X				X		X								
Mapping Memories (p.3)					X														
What's in the Bag? (p.5)					X														
Bldg. Desc. Pyramids (p.7)					X			X											
Scent-Inspired Essays (p.9)				X	X			X						X					
Interruption Game (p.11)		X		X	X						X								
Making Pers. Appeals (p.14)	X									X	X								
Get M! M! M! (p.16)	X			X	X					X					X				
Talking to Yourself (p.18)	X			X		X								X		X			
Character Development (p.19)	X			X	X	X		X											
Aud. Guessing Game (p.21)	X				X						X								
My Voice Is Changing (p.22)	X															X		X	
Contrasting Var. Tones (p.24)	X			X		X			X		X					X		X	
Expl. Favorite Topic (p. 29)									X	X				X					
Replace Boring Words (p.31)				X				X	X				X						
Eval. Clar. & Mech. (p.32)									X		X		X				X		
Condens. Articles (p.34)									X										X
Summ. to Precis. (p.36)				X			X		X		X		X	X			X		X
Link TV to Writing (p.38)								X	X										

Activities Chart (continued)

	Audience/Voice	Class Presentation	Community Involvement	Creative Writing	Description	Dialogue	Documentation	Essay Writing	Exposition	Freewriting	Group Work	Metaphors	Peer Evaluating	Personal Experience	Persuasion	Point of View	Research	Role-Playing	Summarizing
Talk It Through (p.39)						X			X		X		X	X				X	
Ss Examine Papers (p.41)								X	X		X			X					
Interviewing Classmate (p.43)									X		X								
Interact Elderly (p.45)		X	X		X			X	X		X								
Out-of-State Pen Peers (p.47)			X						X				X				X		
Tourist Guide (p.49)			X		X				X		X		X				X	X	
Exploring Censorship (p.52)									X						X		X		
Date-of-Birth Events (p.54)			X		X		X	X	X								X		
Investigating Sci-Fi (p.57)									X								X		
Planning a Road Trip (p.59)			X	X	X				X								X		
4 Imagination Exercises (p.64)				X	X														
Writing from Mind's Eye (p.66)				X	X			X											
Elim. Tired Sayings (p.69)				X	X							X							
Observing Grapes (p.71)				X	X							X							
Effects of Clothing (p.73)				X	X	X		X			X								
Poetry by Candlelight (p.75)				X															
Ss Become Teachers (p.76)		X		X															
Design Magazine (p.77)				X															

Descriptive



Directions

Being Precise

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

Brief Description

In writing, students give directions to an imaginary visitor in their school. Each student then writes a set of instructions for processes such as tying a shoe and sharpening a pencil, and a fellow student performs the stated process.

Objective

To have students use expository writing to explain.

Procedures

- ✎ Write a set of directions that would enable a visitor to your school to find the room in which your class meets.
- ✎ Write a set of directions that would enable the visitor to find your home.
- ✎ Write a set of directions that would enable the visitor to find a local restaurant of your choice.

Focus on the authority of the writer. For evaluation, have students read their paragraphs aloud to the class or in groups and compare their directions.

- ✎ Write a set of instructions for the following processes:

  Tie a shoe.

  Sharpen a pencil.

  Prepare your favorite recipe.

For evaluation, as the writer reads his/her set of instructions aloud, have a student perform the shoe-tying or pencil-sharpening process precisely as prescribed.

Directions

Mapping Memories

Brief Description

Students think back to when they were seven years old, draw detailed maps of their bedrooms and neighborhoods at that time, then complete one of four given writing assignments related to their maps.

Objective

To help students produce specific details in writing by using past memories or experiences.

Procedures

Hand out blank sheets of paper, reassuring worried students that it is not a quiz. Tell students to relax, close their eyes, and think back to when they were seven years old.

- ✎ Picture yourself sitting in your bedroom when you were seven years old. In your mind, look around your bedroom. Take a few minutes to bring back this memory.
- ✎ Map the floor plan of your room in the center of the paper. Mark the placement of doors and windows, and sketch in the furniture as it was positioned in the room.
- ✎ Note as many specific details as possible on your map or on a list beneath—the color of the curtains, the color of the paint or wallpaper, posters hanging on the walls, plants on the dresser, toys and games in the toy chest, etc.

The next day, hand students another blank sheet of paper and have them again return to the time when they were seven years old. This time, however, they don't stay in their bedrooms.

- ✎ In your mind, open the front door of your house, go outside, and take a walk around the block.
- ✎ Draw a map of your neighborhood as it was when you were seven years old. Include street plans for two or three blocks in each direction.
- ✎ Mark all special places on the map: the house of a best friend, names of next-door neighbors, a favorite hiding place,

Source

ED 251 860

Goldberg, Mark F. "Stepping Back into the Past." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

a park, a store, the house of a crotchety neighbor, a steep hill for sliding and sledding, a goldfish pond, a fort, a shortcut to a friend's house, the concrete sidewalk square where all the neighbor kids signed their names, etc.

On the third day, with their maps before them and their memories fresh, students tackle one of the following writing assignments:

- ✎ Describe your bedroom to someone who has never visited your house. Include all details that you can remember, and indicate the general mood stirred up by the furnishings and decorations.

- ✎ Take a visitor on a tour of your neighborhood. Point out what your favorite places were and why they were special to you.

- ✎ Choose an object in your room about which you had strong feelings. Describe your emotions and why you had these feelings.

- ✎ Choose a person or place in your neighborhood, and indicate all your memories about this person or place.

The author uses this lesson with tenth-grade students, but it may be adapted for other levels. A similar lesson from this source (Cobb, Thomas M. "A Dream House") stimulates students' imaginations by having them look ahead to a future home and describe one room of it in detail. Students bring in a real estate advertisement for their dream house, study it, and envision the entire house based on their mental picture of the facts given in the advertisement.

- ✎ Once you have a clear mental image of the house, select one room and describe it in detail.

- ✎ Your written description should include: architectural style, shape of the room, placement of doors and windows, floor covering, drapes or curtains, wallpaper or color of walls, furniture, light fixtures, art work, bric-a-brac, and the view from the window.

Writing Prompts

What's in the Bag?

Brief Description

Given a small paper bag containing a common household item, each student feels through the bag and describes in writing the object inside without identifying it. Students read their descriptions aloud, and the class tries to identify the contents of each bag.

Objective

To give students practice in writing descriptive paragraphs.

Procedures

Assemble a collection of common household items, such as those listed below, and place each item in a small paper bag. Number each bag, and record which item is placed in which numbered bag. Tie the bags shut.

bottle cap	costume jewelry
fuse	pen or pencil
cotton swab	plastic refrigerator dish
cotton ball	measuring spoons
salt or pepper shaker	measuring cups
coin	Christmas ornament
eraser	spool of thread
pliers	Styrofoam coffee cup
pot holder	champagne cork
can opener	comb
light bulb	toothbrush
nail file	small rock
silverware	stapler
pot scrubber	roll of tape

Source

ED 251 860

Little, Deborah. "Grab-Bag Descriptions." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

Explain to the students that they are going to receive a paper bag containing a common object.

- ✎ Write a paragraph describing the object by feeling through the bag. You are not to open the bag.
- ✎ Do not identify by name the object in your bag, even if you immediately recognize it. You are only to describe it.
- ✎ You may write your paragraph from the viewpoint of the object inside the bag, or you may prepare an objective account.

Give students twenty minutes to write their descriptive paragraphs. When the time for feeling and squeezing the bags and for writing the descriptions is up, students read their paragraphs aloud, and the class tries to identify the object. Once the identification has been made, students discuss particularly strong aspects of each descriptive paragraph and suggest ways to make the description more accurate.

In a variation on this assignment, students could swap paragraphs with a partner, and the two could work together to revise each paragraph. In another variation, the class could divide into groups, and each group could write a joint descriptive paragraph. A third variation is for students to prepare a short speech describing their grab-bag objects, rather than writing a paragraph.

Comments/Notes:

Writing Prompts

Building Descriptive Pyramids

Brief Description

Students build adjectives and descriptive phrases onto a single noun, then develop one of them into a longer paragraph or essay.

Objective

To emphasize the importance of using descriptive detail in writing.

Procedures

Place a scoop of ice cream in a dish. Tell students you are going to build a descriptive pyramid, and this ice cream is the basis. Write "ice cream" on the chalkboard.

✎ Add a word or phrase one at a time, and develop the details of the ice cream.

After two or three additions, add a topping or two. The pyramid might look something like this:

ice cream

chocolate ice cream

delicious, chocolate ice cream

soft, delicious, chocolate ice cream

soft, delicious, chocolate ice cream with fudge topping

✎ Examine the words you have added. Which ones are the most descriptive? Which ones appeal specifically to the sense of taste? How does the last line compare to the first?

Once the ice cream has melted, try another pyramid.

Write "a child" on the chalkboard.

✎ On a sheet of paper, build adjectives and descriptive phrases onto "a child" the same way you did with the ice cream example.

Six or seven lines should be enough to check progress. Ask students to read aloud the last lines they provided. Write some on the chalkboard, and discuss the different pictures created by the outcomes.

Source

ED 283 145

Robitaille, Marilyn M. "Using the Lesson Cycle in Teaching Composition: A Plan for Creativity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 29 pp.

✎ Build descriptive pyramids for the following nouns: a school, a street, a car, a room, and a thief.

Have students use one of the phrases from the exercise above to develop it into a longer paragraph or essay based on any one of several sensory impressions drawn from the last lines of the pyramid.

Results/Benefits

Though in some instances student writers overkill with too much description, the problem is generally a failure to provide color and life to their writing. With this method, they can compare the full, descriptive details with the single word and see the potential for using vivid details.

Comments/Notes:

Writing Prompts

Scent-Inspired Essays

Brief Description

Roused by various aromatic samples, students concentrate on the scenes triggered by the scents, then each student writes a descriptive essay based on these impressions.

Objective

To help students distinguish between a narrative essay and a descriptive essay.

Procedures

Prepare six or seven small, lidded jars by placing a cotton ball doused with anything aromatic in each one. Use your imagination. Good possibilities include perfume or aftershave; potpourri oils such as lemon, evergreen, or rose; moth balls; horse manure; vanilla; coffee. Tell students it is possible to evoke strong memories of places and people by rousing the sense of smell. Pass around each jar with plenty of time for sniffing. Be dramatic as you tell students to let their imaginations carry them to the scenes created in their minds by one of these scents.

- Concentrate on the scene in your mind. Make your impressions as vivid as possible.
- Share with the class how you would finish this sentence: "This scent makes me think of...."
- List at least three categories across your paper: *The Place, The Feelings,* and *The People.* You may want a moment to smell a second time the aroma that you chose. Brainstorm a series of ideas and impressions beneath each category.
- Once brainstorming is complete, share some of your impressions. Do any common elements exist, such as two people choosing the same holiday? What might have caused this similarity to occur?

Explain to students the distinction between a narrative essay and a descriptive essay. A descriptive essay accentuates details of one particular scene and is only loosely bound by narrative structure. A narrative essay is a connected account of events.

Source

ED 283 145

Labbitaille, Marilyn M. "Using the Lesson Cycle in Teaching Composition: A Plan for Creativity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 29 pp.

Comments:

Because the structure of the essays is loosely woven, students may find any number of organizational patterns appropriate, depending on the topic and on the method of developing details.

- ✎ Organize your brainstorming lists by checking for relevance.
- ✎ Write a descriptive essay in which you describe your scene for an audience. Develop your three categories along the following structure: a beginning (entrance to the scene or general impression of the scene), a middle (provided through sensory detail and description), and an ending (leaving the scene).
- ✎ Choose one of the following scenes and write a descriptive essay: a firework display, a junkyard, the cafeteria, the beach in winter, a city street at 2 a.m., an art museum, a ski lift, a secluded swimming hole, or a pasture right after a rain. Attempt to convey as accurately as possible the atmosphere and your own response to being there. Accompany your descriptive essay with an original abstract drawing or collage that further illustrates your perceptions.

Comments/Notes:

Detail

Interruption Game

Brief Description

Each student writes a detailed narrative, then reads it to the group. Group members constantly interrupt to ask every question they can think of to prevent the reader from getting to the end of the narrative within the time limit. The game is played a second time, allowing for better preparation of details.

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

Objectives

To show students how much detail they can actually produce, and to motivate them to generate as much detail as they can.

Procedures

Day One

Give the students a cartoon or a picture depicting a situation about which it is easy to conjecture a background, for example, a cartoon showing two castles with a valley in between. On the balcony of one castle is a king, queen, prince, and his bride, the neighboring princess. The prince is saying, "There's really not much to tell. I just grew up and married the girl next door." Discuss the situation in the picture, such as what it would be like to be a prince growing up and how a prince might go about courting a princess.

✎ Write a narrative detailing something about the backgrounds of the people in the picture. Be specific in your detail.

When using the castle scene, students can write about the prince's and princess's backgrounds, about how they met, and about their courting—where they went, what they did, etc.

Day Two

✎ Form groups of three to five people. You have 10 minutes to read your narrative to the group. The rest of the group will be constantly interrupting you to ask every question they can think of to prevent you from finishing your narrative within ten minutes.

✎ Each time a question is asked, you must stop and fill in that detail, writing it on your paper.

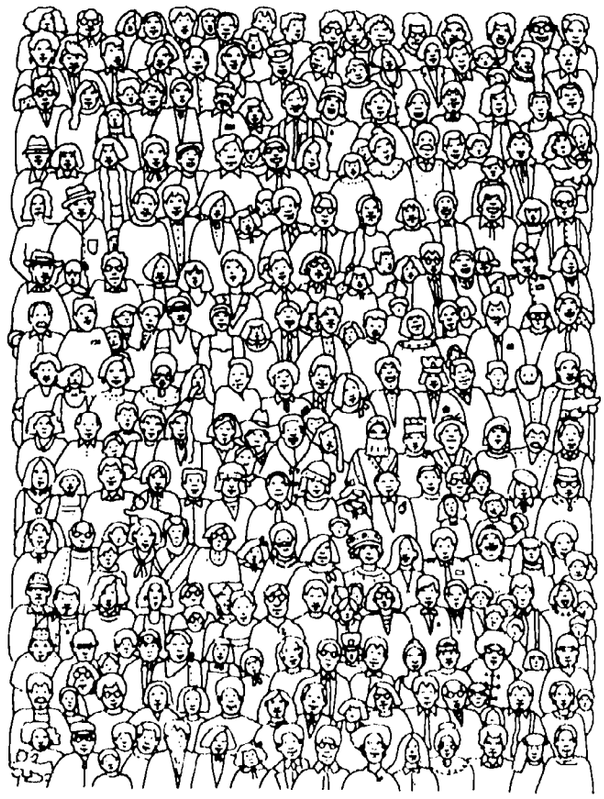
Have the students play the game a second time. Students will work hard at getting in as much specific and graphic detail as they can. Emphasize that it is the quality of the details that matters, not the quantity.

Results/Benefits

Not only do students look forward to the second writing session of the game, but they also learn the art of being specific and of selecting details which clearly and effectively tell their particular story.

Comments/Notes:

Audience/Voice



Freewriting

Making Persuasive Appeals

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

Brief Description

In writing, students adjust their voices for three different appeals in an imaginary attempt to receive a higher grade on a recent assignment.

Objectives

To help students tune in to an audience, know audience needs and expectations, and understand the importance of connecting with an audience.

Procedures

✎ Think of a recent graded assignment on which you would like a higher grade. Explore a range of appeals to have your grade raised. Deliberately alter your voice in three different written pieces.

1. In your first appeal, deny any responsibility for the grade. Place the blame squarely on the teacher.
2. In your second appeal, grovel for a higher grade. Be humble and ingratiating. Beg, if you must, but get that grade raised.
3. In the third appeal, reason with your teacher. Lay out the facts in a no-nonsense fashion. Be courteous but unyielding. Convince your teacher to raise your grade in a coldly logical piece.

✎ After freewriting your appeals, form small groups for discussion. Examine your three pieces for similarities and differences. Take turns revealing your most comfortable voice, and explain why you find it most comfortable.

✎ Speculate about the voices. Would the first voice work on any teacher you know? Would the second or third voice work?

✎ Zero in on the audience to whom each appeal is directed. Would a fourth voice or perhaps a combination of voices be more convincing? To what kind of appeals will a person listen? What kind of appeal will put off a teacher? Can you alter the language to elicit a more favorable response?

Results/Benefits

Students realize that the success of a piece of writing is dependent upon their ability to know their audience, just as it is in getting their grade changed.

Comments/Notes:

Freewriting

Get Mad! Get Mushy! Get Manipulative!

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

Brief Description

Students concentrate on putting themselves in each of three writing voices: anger, encouragement, and persuasiveness; then they take on each voice as they write for five minutes.

Objective

To familiarize each student with the sound of his/her own voice on the page by experiencing a range of writing voices.

Procedures

Mad Talk

✎ Think of someone or something that makes you very angry. Who really makes you mad? Do not say the name aloud; just think of the person. Or maybe there is something that makes you madder than any person does, such as your neighbor's aggravating dog. Or maybe it is a situation that really steams you, such as some rule at school. Think of it! Close your eyes and see your subject. Concentrate hard! Get mad! Take five minutes to say in writing the angry things you feel about that person, thing, or situation.

Soft Talk

✎ Think of a person or thing in need of comforting—someone who has been hurt, who is in trouble, or who is suffering in some way. Maybe it is an animal that is sick, a pet hit by a car, or something inanimate you feel sorry for, such as an old car. Concentrate on that person, animal, or thing, and feel sorry. Close your eyes, and visualize your subject. Now write for five minutes to comfort that person or thing.

Fast Talk

✎ Think of somebody whom you want to talk into believing or doing something. Persuade that person to believe or do it. Visualize your subject. Concentrate on winning him/her over. For five minutes, write your most persuasive argument to that person.

Make three columns on the chalkboard for "Mad Talk," "Soft Talk," and "Fast Talk." Have students volunteer to read aloud at least two of their papers and talk about how the papers changed from one voice to another. Under each heading, list the stylistic devices used in each paper as it is read. Stylistic devices used in "Mad Talk" may include loaded language, abrupt sentences, repetition of key words and phrases, and sometimes profanity. "Soft Talk" stylistic devices may include repetitious, rhythmical sentences linked with conjunctions, little punctuation, and a slow pace. Stylistic devices in "Fast Talk" may be logical, parallel sentence patterns, and strong, active, or imperative verbs.

Results/Benefits

Students become more confident in their own styles of writing as they learn how they sound when they write. They become encouraged when they learn that they instinctively use the same stylistic devices professional writers use to create written voices.

Comments/Notes:

Dialogue

Talking to Yourself

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School. A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

Brief Description

Given a situation, students write a dialogue in which they say something and talk back to themselves during a 30-minute time period.

Objective

To allow students to experiment with writing in two distinct voices and points of view.

Procedures

✎ Write quickly for 30 minutes on one of the following situations. Write a dialogue in which you say something and talk back to yourself.

1. You are about to do something that you know is wrong.
2. You have just wrecked your father's car.
3. You have money for a new album, but which one will you buy?
4. Your parents expect you home at a certain time, and you are two hours late. The lights are on, and you know they are up waiting for you.
5. You have just been kicked out of class and are waiting in the assistant principal's office.
6. The police have just pulled you over for speeding. The officer is walking up to your car.

Have students read their papers aloud.

✎ Talk about the two voices in your paper. How are the two voices different? How do the voices shift registers as they change points of view?

Dialogue

Character Development

Brief Description

Students write a dialogue for two characters and distinguish characters' personalities through conversation.

Objective

To give students practice in writing dialogue.

Procedures

Bring in two large photographs, each showing an interesting-looking person. Avoid using celebrities because students may have preconceived ideas about their personality traits. On a cassette tape, prerecord a one-minute dialogue that could take place between the two people. During the lesson, the students will be continuing the dialogue in writing. Make a written version of the conversation so that students may see examples of correct punctuation when writing dialogue. Use a variety of sentence structures. Use topics appropriate for the interests and ability levels of your students.

Display the photographs, asking students to study the two people pictured. Define dialogue. Explain how writers use dialogue in character development. Play the recording of the dialogue.

- ✎ Share with the class your general impressions of the two characters whose conversation you have just heard.

Distribute a written version of the recorded conversation, and play the tape a second time. Discuss punctuation with the students.

- ✎ Examine specific word choices that reveal character traits.
- ✎ Continue the dialogue between the two characters by writing four or five sentences.

Check for problems with punctuation. Have students put sample sentences on the chalkboard or have them dictate as you write on the overhead projector. Examine the extent to which students maintained the character traits communicated in your example.

Source

ED 283 145

Robitaille, Marilyn M. "Using the Lesson Cycle in Teaching Composition: A Plan for Creativity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 29 pp.

Prepare three large envelopes labeled "places," "subjects," and "characters." Write the following on slips of paper and place them in the appropriate envelopes:

Places: a classroom, a kitchen, a bank, a newspaper office, a castle, a sea shore, a pool hall, a library, a grocery store, a theater, a mountain top, a deserted road, a swimming pool, a museum, a rock concert, a hot-air balloon, a space ship, a cave, a car, and a skating rink

Subjects: asking advice, an approaching storm, borrowing money, telling a family story, asking for help to perform some task, telling a joke, asking directions, selling something, selecting a movie, selecting a book, exercising, telling a lie, marriage, and what to do on a holiday

Characters: yourself, a teacher, a criminal, an angel, a teenager, a boss, a snob, a rock star, a mother, a father, a know-it-all, a scientist, an athlete, a dancer, an artist, a cook, a butler, a race car driver, a fisherman, and a robot

Have enough slips so that students can draw one from "places," one from "subjects," and two from "characters." (Some of these could be duplicated.)

✎ After you have drawn your options, write a page of dialogue concerning these people in these situations. The dialogue must reflect the place and subject. Distinguish your characters' personalities through their conversations.

✎ Incorporate this dialogue into a short story or a narrative essay. Check your papers carefully for correct punctuation.

Results/Benefits

This lesson is a useful activity to prepare students to use correct punctuation in a dialogue-based short story or narrative essay.

Writing Prompts

Audience Guessing Game

Source

ED 251 860

Vaux, Shirley. "Writing for an Audience." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

Brief Description

Student groups are each given a different set of instructions to write a paragraph about a certain object and for a specific audience. Each group reads its paragraph aloud, allowing the others to guess what its instructions were and for what audience the writing is intended.

Objective

To encourage students to produce clear, concise compositions written for a particular audience for a particular purpose.

Procedures

Bring to class a common object, such as a sprinkling can, a stapler, a necktie, or a paperweight. Have students form small groups of four or five students, and give each group a different set of instructions for writing about the object. Each group writes a paragraph according to its directions, such as the following:

- Examine the object and describe it so that your reader can walk into a store and pick it out from all others similar to it.
- Write an internal office memo to convince your manager that this object should be purchased for all the employees in your company.
- Explain to someone who has never seen this object how to use it efficiently.
- You are an archaeologist two hundred years from now. Write in your journal about this object you have just unearthed.
- Suppose you came to school and discovered that you *were* the object. How would you spend your day?
- Tell a story about the object to a kindergarten class.

A reader from each group reads just the paragraph aloud. The class must guess what each group's writing instructions were and for what audience the writing is intended.

Role-Play

My Voice Is Changing!

Source
ED 298 500
Decker, Norma, Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

Brief Description

Given specific audiences, students role-play different voices in writing then discuss the alterations in voice as influenced by the various audiences.

Objectives

To train students to envision an invisible audience while writing and guess what their readers will need.

Procedures

As the different audiences are given, allow students time to respond to the following scenes:

- You have a guest over for dinner. Your mother has gone to great lengths to see that everything is just right. In the middle of dinner, your sister, the klutz, spills a glass of milk in your lap. Write what you say when:
  1. the guest is your boy/girlfriend
  2. the guest is your sister's boyfriend
  3. the guest is your mother's new boss
- You leave school early for a dental appointment. Unfortunately, you have a wreck in the school parking lot. You're okay, but the car sustains about $300 worth of damage. Write what you say to:
  1. the oaf who backed into you
  2. the friend from whom you borrowed the car
  3. the school official who heard the crash
  4. the parent who instructed you to take the city bus to the dentist's office
- With the class, discuss audience strategies employed by the "you" in each scene.
- What voice changes did you note as the audience changed?

- ✎ Did the speaker alter language choices? Explain.
- ✎ Did you note any changes in the speaker's story? Speech?
- ✎ If applicable, give examples of the speaker being blatantly dishonest, as opposed to being sensitive to the audience.

Results/Benefits

Students learn that although it is easy to keep audience in mind when speaking, the task is not so simple when writing. Students also discover the importance and influence of an audience when writing.

Comments/Notes:

Role-Play

Contrasting Various Tones

Source

ED 283 145

Robitaille, Marilyn M. "Using the Lesson Cycle in Teaching Composition: A Plan for Creativity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 29 pp.

Brief Description

Students role-play four different situations, then write sample paragraphs in a variety of tones.

Objectives

To lead students to consider the way situation controls language and tone, and to help them select and maintain consistently the tone most appropriate for specific topics in their writing.

Procedures

Group students into pairs, preferably girl-boy pairs. Provide each group with four index cards describing the roles for the role-playing activity. Let students know you will be asking for volunteers to role-play the different situations for the entire class.

Card 1: Channel 5 News Team

You are the Channel 5 News Team, two of the most dedicated individuals in the field of television news. Deliver the following story in your own words to the television camera for coverage at 5 p.m. The station is just recovering from a heavy lawsuit for failure to be objective, so keep absolute fair play and objectivity in mind.

Who: Wanda Sparks

What: Ran her brand-new red Corvette through the plate glass window of Golden's Jewelry Store

When: Last night sometime around 2 a.m.

Where: The heart of your downtown

Why: She was asleep at the wheel.

How: She jumped the curb after failing to take a sharp right-hand curve. As she plowed into the glass storefront, she pinned a would-be thief under her car. He has yet to be identified, and neither party incurred any injuries.

Card 2: Wanda Sparks and Policeman

You are the driver of a brand-new red Corvette. You have always had your own way, and your immense wealth allows you considerable clout. As you were driving through a small, uninteresting town, you made an error calculating your speed (and your ability to stay awake); you overshot a right-hand turn. This landed you right through a plate glass window of a quaint little jewelry store. You own more jewels than they have in their entire inventory, and you are certainly not concerned over their silly window. You have a wallet full of $1,000 bills. Once you have collected yourself, you realize there is a man wearing a ski mask trapped beneath your car. He does not seem to be bleeding, so you put on fresh lipstick. When the policeman for this one-horse town comes screaming up in his unattractive patrol car, greet him in your best sarcastic voice. Assure him that you can pay for any damages, but you do not want to be issued a ticket. That could upset "Daddykins," and he might take away your allowance. Remember, you are slightly bored by this whole affair.

Card 3: Thief and Wife

You are the thief who is pinned under the car. You have just been released from prison, and this time they will throw away the key. Your wife and nine children will have to fend for themselves again; you are going to grow old in prison. There is no use asking for mercy. You knew the consequences were serious when you set out to rob Golden's Jewelry Store. Call your wife on the telephone and tearfully explain to her that you have just arrived at the police station. Ask her to give your love to the children. The two of you should try to make some plans for their welfare. Try to comfort her during this difficult time.

Card 4: Owner and Best Friend

You are the owner of Golden's Jewelry Store. You are positively delighted to receive all the free publicity from the crash-in/break-in. The thief did not get away with anything, and Wanda Sparks gave you $5,000 cash for a $75 window. The Channel 5 News Team did an excellent job covering the story, and you had several minutes of free, prime-time air time. You have already sold $4,000 worth of jewelry to curiosity seekers. Your best friend calls to console you. Convince your friend that this is about the best thing that has ever happened to you.

Help students contrast the varying tones that emerge in the conversations. Provide students with a formal definition of tone, and ask them to describe the tone communicated in each of the four situations, (Card 1: journalistic or objective; Card 2: bitter or sarcastic; Card 3: sad, desperate, or melancholy; Card 4: light-hearted or happy). Have volunteers role-play the four situations for the entire class.

Write the words "Close the door" on the chalkboard.

✎ Write a paragraph describing any situation which could end with "Close the door." Beneath your paragraph, identify the tone the speaker of this statement would use, given the situation described in the paragraph.

Ask for volunteers to read their paragraphs aloud and to emphasize the last line solidly enough so that class members can identify the tone communicated.

✎ Write a paragraph or two on one of the following subjects, being careful to select the tone most appropriate for the chosen topic and to maintain consistency of that tone: a pet cemetery, a trip to a sports event, a moment of nervous competition, winning a lottery, or making a commitment to excellence.

Results/Benefits

When confronted with assignments for longer essays, students will be conscious of the decision-making process involved in choices of tone and the way those choices relate to language.

Comments/Notes:

Expository

Freewriting

Exploring Everybody's Favorite Topic

Brief Description

Students experiment with a freewriting exercise.

Objective

To provide students with an opportunity to gain fluency and confidence in written discourse.

Procedures

Introduce students to freewriting by telling them that they do not have to worry about organization and mechanics.

✎ When you freewrite, you write as fast as you can, letting words and ideas tumble out of your mind onto the page. Freewriting helps you discover what you know and what you feel. Some freewriting pieces will blossom into more polished pieces of writing; others will just help you clarify your thinking.

Guide your students in a 10-15 minute freewriting exercise by asking them the questions listed below as they write.

✎ Do not try to answer all of the questions asked during your freewriting. If you get rolling on something, stay with it. Let your pen or pencil follow your thoughts. Keep writing. Look inside yourself.

1. What special knowledge and abilities do you have?
2. What are some things you know more about than other people do?
3. What are some things about yourself that make you proud?
4. What are some of your hopes for the future?
5. What are some things you hope to know more about?
6. What do you spend most of your non-school time doing?

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

- ✎ Reread your freewriting piece quietly to yourself. Ask yourself these questions: Does it sound like me talking? Is it truthful? Does it say what I wanted to say?
- ✎ Check carefully for missing words. Fix up any parts which are not clear. Reread your piece again. Mark parts that you think are particularly good. Keep all your writing.

Have students freewrite on a topic and begin a draft. Use freewriting as a way to generate topics. Allow students to interact and to talk informally with one another about their ideas and plans as they begin their drafts.

Results/Benefits

Without requiring the attention that a formal piece of expository writing may require, freewriting exercises promote fluency and confidence in students' writing. The lesson also provides students with experience in the prewriting stage of the writing process.

Comments/Notes:

Word Choice

Replacing Boring Verbs

Brief Description

Students write a page-long essay on any topic without using any form of the verbs "be," "have," "go," or "get."

Objectives

To encourage students to use a variety of language features: to use an active voice, to use clauses, phrases, and appositives, to use simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences, to be precise and clear, to "economize" th words, to discover the differences between the informality o spoken and written language, and to confront the difficulty of proofreading their own papers. (The lesson may also be used as a synonym/thesaurus exercise.)

Procedures

- ✎ Write a page-long essay on any topic without using any form of the verbs "be," "have," "go," or "get."

  Examples: Replace "go" in "The team goes to the field" with "walks," "runs," "stumbles," "sprints," "ambulates," or "saunters." Change "Carla was the protagonist of the story who was most heroic when the storm was at its worst" to "Carla, protagonist of the story, rose to heroics when the storm blew its worst."

- ✎ Exchange papers to let someone help you proofread.

Results/Benefits

The lesson provides a leap in students' writing self-esteem. Some students realize that essays not only improve when read by someone else, but that essays are meant to be read. The exercise encourages better writing—improving variety, coherence, and continuity.

Source

Broyles, Bill. "Let's Not Have to Get Going: Eliminating Weak Verbs," *English Journal*, v77 n6 p59-60, Oct 1988.

Main Idea

Evaluating Clarity and Mechanics

Source

Brown, Jane Lightcap. "Helping Students Help Themselves: Peer Evaluation of Writing," *Curriculum Review*, v23 n1 p47-50, Feb 1984.

Brief Description

In groups and individually, students evaluate published and student-written paragraphs, focusing on main idea clarity and mechanics.

Objectives

To develop students' awareness of what to look for and what to say about the writing of their peers, overcoming the students' reluctance to be negatively critical about each other's work.

Procedures

Distribute copies of three or four paragraphs taken from any publication, such as a newspaper, professional journal, or popular magazine, or use students' work from previous classes. Two or three of the paragraphs should be inferior—with few details and an unclear or even unstated topic sentence. If you have trouble finding such paragraphs, create them by scissoring away the topic sentence and some of the supporting sentences of a well-written paragraph, leaving a vague collection of middle sentences that do not convey a clear message. The other paragraphs, copied in their entirety, are to be more successful in stating a main idea and supporting it.

- ✎ After reading the paragraphs, write a response for each, using these questions as guides: (1) What is the main idea of this paragraph? (2) What additional information is needed to make the main idea clear?

- ✎ In groups of three or four, discuss and compare your answers for about ten minutes. Determine how closely you agree on the main idea of each paragraph. List the kinds of additional information requested by each person.

- ✎ As a class, review the findings of each group and analyze the answers to the following questions: (1) What are the reasons for differences in main-idea statements? (2) What kind of additional information is required?

Emphasize the importance of clearly stating a paragraph's main idea. Next, have students anonymously submit their own paragraphs. Distribute copies for small-group discussion or use an

overhead projector for whole-class discussion to consider the previous two questions regarding main ideas. Have students respond to a third question: (3) What problems with spelling, punctuation, or grammar need correction?

Encourage student honesty by noting that objective remarks help writers improve their writing, as well as help the other students become more accomplished critics and writers. Assign students to devise their own paragraphs to be evaluated by a partner.

- ✎ Select a partner, exchange paragraphs, and write detailed answers to the foregoing three questions. Your criticism must be clear, precise, and sufficiently detailed to communicate your intent. When finished, exchange commentaries and discuss them briefly.

Have students pass their paragraphs from one pair to another for a series of responses.

- ✎ Copy a paragraph verbatim from one of your textbooks. Exchange paragraphs with a peer. Locate the paragraph's main idea and list supporting information.

- ✎ Search the library to find editorials or other brief excerpts that you judge to be examples of either clear or unclear written communication. Discuss the material with a partner.

- ✎ Write a fully-developed paragraph, then write an intentionally vague summary of it. Exchange summaries and expand your partner's summary by adding whatever details and examples you feel are necessary to make the central idea fully understandable to the reader. Compare your expanded paragraph with your partner's original and discuss possible techniques to use in developing a main idea.

Results/Benefits

Students see the need for their own writing to be clear and exact, and they realize that they are writing to a larger audience than the teacher alone. Students become more accurate judges of the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing.

Summary

Condensing Non-Fiction Articles

Source

ED 283 145

Robitaille, Marilyn M. "Using the Lesson Cycle in Teaching Composition: A Plan for Creativity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 29 pp.

Brief Description

Students summarize an article and determine which points must be included to condense it effectively.

Objective

To aid students in the ability to discern between the important and the not-so-important when writing a summary.

Procedures

Bring to class a back pack or a small box and a number of items useful for survival in the wilderness, making sure that you have too many items (by five or six) to fit in your container.

> ✎ The items placed before you are the only possible comforts of home you can take with you on a three-month wilderness expedition. You will be much too far away to obtain any other provisions during your stay. The items you choose to take with you will be all you will have for the duration of the trip. What will be most essential to insure survival?

Some discussion should result concerning which choices are wisest. As students make their choices, place the articles in the container. Show them how limited the space is. At this point, make the analogy that preparing the back pack is much like preparing a summary: "We are forced to choose only the most important items."

Define summary and discuss length limitation of a condensed version. To give students examples of the summary form, read selections from *Reader's Digest* and television program summaries from *T.V. Guide*. If a research paper has been assigned, emphasize the role of summarizing in note-taking.

Distribute a non-fiction article no longer than 200-350 words to the class. You might use something from one of their textbooks.

> ✎ Read the article and list details that should be included to condense the information as accurately as possible in no more than 50-75 words.

With this completed, provide your own checklist on the overhead projector. Work through each item and justify its conclusion.

✎ Check your list and make adjustments if you have left out crucial points.

Show students your own written summary drawn from your list of details. Emphasize your concise wording, pointing out that you have not used the original writer's words.

Provide students with another article similar to the one used previously. Have them do the two-stage process of listing and summarizing.

Results/Benefits

Students should be able to apply this procedure to articles used in research papers and reports. As they discover articles on their individual topics, summarizing will make note-taking more efficient. You might also want to discuss the uses of summarizing in writing research papers and reports.

Comments/Notes:

Summary

From Summary to Précis

Source
ED 239 209
Acton, Karen; Griffith, Judy. "Précis-Summary: Activity Guide." Area Education Agency 7, Cedar Falls, IA. 1980. 18 pp.

Brief Description

Students produce summaries and précis during a verbal communication activity and two writing activities.

Objectives

To teach students how to write a summary and a précis of a written work.

Procedures

Explain to the students the definitions of terms such as summary, précis (a summary of a piece of writing maintaining the point of view and tone of the original), paraphrase, point of view, tone, documentation, and plagiarism. To check their understanding, have students write a paragraph explaining the difference between the definitions of summary and précis.

- ✎ Jot down complete notes on an important event in your life, such as a vacation, a wedding, or a graduation.
- ✎ Select a partner. Using your notes, tell your partner about the event. Keep track of your starting and finishing time. Your partner may take notes during your story.
- ✎ After you have finished, your partner must give you a verbal summary of your event in less than half the time you took. For example, if you recount your brother's wedding in six minutes, your partner may take no more than three minutes to give the summary.
- ✎ Write down the major points your partner included, the major points left out, and the minor details or inaccuracies he/she included that should have been left out.
- ✎ Your partner must again tell you about the event, but this time, he/she pretends to be you and tells the summarized story as if you were telling it—a précis.

After each partner has practiced, have students turn in their timed and corrected notes for credit.

✎ Find a piece of expository writing that is very emotional, such as a letter, column, or editorial. Take notes, then write a summary and a précis. Be sure to document your source. On a separate sheet of paper, explain what a reader would miss if your summary were read but not the précis. What types of information would be missed and why would they be valuable?

Have students turn in their notes, summary, précis, and explanation for credit.

✎ Bring to class a copy of an article that is at least one page long and take notes on it. Write a summary of your article, including documentation. Trade material with a partner and critique his/her notes and summary. Is too much or too little included? Is there any plagiarism? Is the main idea clear? Write comments on your partner's paper, discussing them if necessary. After discussing your partner's comments about your summary, write a précis on your original article, adding point of view and tone.

Collect students' articles, notes and comments, summaries, and précis for evaluation.

Comments/Notes:

Writing Process

Linking Television and Writing

Source

ED 280 031

Jeremiah, Milford A. "Using Television News and Documentaries for Writing Instruction." Paper presented at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1987. 13 pp.

Brief Description

After watching a television news account or documentary, students produce an outline from the video tape, organize it, and turn it in. The next day, after receiving their outlines, students use the class period to produce a full-length essay.

Objective

To help students become more proficient in the use of written language by linking the world of television with the written word.

Procedures

Select a television news account or documentary that is 5-15 minutes long, addresses one item or issue, and focuses on either information or persuasion of the major content factor for the listeners. As a warm-up mechanism, introduce the writing skill (i.e., information or persuasion) on an overhead projector. Topics are to include an introductory paragraph, adequate support, and argumentation.

Allow students 5-10 minutes for questions and comments, then present the news segment. You may need to play the segment a second time and allow them to take notes.

✎ Produce an outline from the news stimulus.

After 15-20 minutes, assess the outlines for organization or permit peer reviews. Collect the outlines to minimize any external influences should students take the outlines with them. Return their outlines during the next class period.

✎ Produce a full-length essay from your outline.

Results/Benefits

The use of television materials as advocated in this lesson would allow for skills integration (i.e., listening, speaking, and thinking) in the writing process. This instructional model would be especially valuable to younger students and reluctant writers of any age who often fail to understand that all of their favorite television programs begin with a written work.

Writing Process

Talking It Through

Brief Description

In one writing activity, students role-play a situation, then write responses; in the other, pairs of students eavesdrop on conversations around school, then write humorous dialogues. Both writing activities are peer edited and rewritten.

Source

ED 229 762

Reid, Louann. "Talking: The Neglected Part of the Writing Process." Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference, 1983. 10 pp.

Objectives

To encourage students to talk throughout the process of prewriting, drafting, and revising so they can test their ideas, explore words, experiment with different methods of organization, and enrich the finished product without stunting its growth.

Procedures

Talk: Role-Play

Give students a situation to role-play, preferably a problem they may have encountered, such as teenage pregnancy. Set the scene, then provide the conflict. Students might respond well to the following:

> ✎ Your best friend has been going out with a lot of guys. One night at a party, she got so drunk that she says she cannot remember what happened, but now she has found out that she is pregnant. She is afraid to tell her parents; she does not know who the father is; she does not believe in abortion. She has come to you for advice. With a partner, take turns role-playing what you would tell her.

Other, less personal problems may be used. Have students freewrite their responses.

> ✎ After freewriting, develop a persuasive paper offering your advice, a letter replying to your friend, or a dialogue recreating the conversation between the two of you.

Have students, in pairs or small groups, read their papers aloud and receive comments on how to make the papers better. Have them exchange papers and peer edit in these groups before they make final revisions.

Talk: Collect Dialogues

Ask students to go around the school in pairs as homework, eavesdropping on conversations. When they return, have them write up dialogues.

- ✎ Write up the best dialogue you heard while eavesdropping. Make it longer, shorter, funnier, weirder, whatever.
- ✎ Read your dialogue to a listener, adding whatever additional information is necessary for the listener to understand it.
- ✎ Rewrite the dialogue, including necessary exposition.

Have volunteers perform their finished products for the class.

Results/Benefits

Students use talk to improve their expressive and expository writing.

Comments/Notes:

Writing Process

Students Examine Their Own Papers

Brief Description

After handing in the final draft of a finished paper, students write in class about what went into the process of writing their papers.

Objectives

To help students improve their writing and gain confidence by learning how some of their peers cope with the writing process and by examining the process they themselves use in writing.

Procedures

Before using this activity, it is a good idea to wait until students have written two or three papers and have done lots of informal writing. On the day when the final draft of a finished paper is due, collect their work and assign an in-class paper entitled "How I Wrote This Paper." Encourage students to be as specific as possible, including all details they can remember about working on the paper both at home and in class.

Source

CS 212 072

Rosen, Lois M. "Writing about Writing." In *The Best of "Notes Plus:" Practical Classroom Activities for Junior and Senior High School Students.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1989. 87 pp.

✎ For twenty minutes, write in response to the following questions. Conclude by estimating how much time it took you to write and revise your paper.

1. Did you need to write in a special place?
2. Did you write with the television on? With music playing? In a quiet atmosphere?
3. Did you use a particular writing utensil or special paper?
4. Were there any particular circumstances or techniques that made it easier or more difficult for you to write?
5. How did you get started?
6. What did you do if and when you got stuck?
7. Did you need an outline or notes or freewritings?
8. How much did you revise?
9. Did you make more than one draft?

10. Did you read your work to anyone or talk about it with anyone?
11. What kind of final editing and polishing did you do?
12. What was the toughest part of this paper for you?
13. What was the easiest part?

Put students into groups of four to read their papers aloud to each other. This usually takes another twenty minutes.

✎ Discuss the following questions while one member of your group takes notes.

1. Were there any similarities among the ways group members wrote?
2. Were there major differences among the ways group members wrote?
3. Did anyone have an especially interesting or unusual approach to writing?
4. Did group members agree that any kinds of circumstances made it more difficult to write?
5. What circumstances or techniques would you recommend as making writing easier, faster, or more pleasant?

Ask each group's recorder to make a brief report. Take notes on the chalkboard. Usually the reports quite naturally fall into a set of prewriting, writing, revising, and editing strategies, which you can organize across the chalkboard. Conclude by comparing the estimates of writing time, a range that may run from a low of six hours to a high of seventeen for a standard three-page paper.

Results/Benefits

By the end of this exploration of writing styles, students have some ideas on how to improve the way they write and have the assurance that their writing behaviors are normal. The group sharing of responses is often playful as well as instructive; students share their pleasures and pains with the papers they have handed in, offering anecdotes about 3 a.m. inspiration, writer's block, and the emergency trip to the store for a favorite type of ballpoint pen.

Biography

Interviewing a Classmate

Brief Description

Students use short biographies for one-minute oral reports and for authoring stories in which they meet their biographical characters. Students later write a three- to five-page biography of a classmate.

Objectives

To give students a better understanding of reading and writing biographies, and to lead them to think of biographical figures as real people.

Procedures

To begin the unit, have students read short, story-length biographies. Discuss what the author might have left out and why, emphasizing that irrelevant items are excluded.

> ✎ After reading several biographies on your own, speak for a minute or so about one of the biographical figures you find interesting. Make your character come alive for the class.

The students should not be overly prepared for this. They should speak honestly about the kind of person they studied. They should be prompted and guided with questions and comments such as, "Would he/she make a good friend?" "Is there anything you dislike about your character?"

> ✎ Select an interesting character and write a short story in which you meet him/her in some way. How do your lives interact? Are you close friends with your character? Rivals? Are you the character's school teacher? Parent?

After a few days of studying these short biographies, students are ready to move on to something more challenging.

> ✎ Write a three- to five-page biography of a classmate, stressing the character of the person through emotions and anecdotes.

Spend a class period or two discussing how to gather the information your students will need.

Source

Johnson, Scott. "The Biography: Teach It from the Inside Out," *English Journal*, v75 n6 p27-29, Oct 1986.

✎ The biography may not be written in question/answer form. It should not be a "driver's license" biography with color of eyes, weight, date of birth, etc. Instead, find out about friends, family, hobbies, ambitions, memories, and embarrassing moments. As homework, come up with a list of twenty questions you will use.

Brainstorm these questions as a class. Demonstrate good and bad interviews to show students that an effective questioner really listens, not just jotting down an answer and proceeding to the next item. Train them in posing follow-up questions and spotting potentially interesting information to avoid biographies composed of bare facts, figures, and little else. Post two sets of interview assignments. Half of the class interviews the other half for twenty minutes. Then the students who were interviewed first become the interviewers, but their subjects are not the same people who were questioning them.

✎ You have twenty minutes to interview the partner chosen for you. The partner you interview will not be the person interviewing you.

Sit in on interviews to nudge students with questions when communication breaks down. If they want more time for interviewing, insist that they follow up on their own—at lunch, in homeroom, over the telephone.

✎ Pick two or three notable qualities about your subject, e.g., a sense of humor, travel experiences, ability with mechanical objects, and so on, rather than in what hospital he/she was born or how many children his/her sister has. If these qualities seem to be important to an understanding of the person you are writing about, make them the centerpiece of the biography.

Have students work on drafts at home. Discuss how to turn even the dullest life into an interesting biography and how to make a general statement and develop it with specifics. Use an overhead projector to show how good—or boring—an introduction may be, and to show how a conclusion should make a strong, overall statement about the person. Guarantee strict secrecy with the finished drafts to make them feel a bit more confident about making statements that in many cases may not be flattering but are often truthful and perceptive.

Results/Benefits

The interview makes your students feel special, feel that they are individuals whose thoughts and interests are worth something after all. Analytical and organizational skills are fostered and applied. The unit demonstrates to students that with some thought and planning, just about anything, and certainly their own lives, can make for interesting reading.

Community Involvement

Interacting with the Elderly

Brief Description

After studying the aging process through research and interviews, students write skits based on the elderly and act them out before the entire class. Each student then writes an essay to describe his/her feelings while interacting with elderly people or when viewing the class skits.

Source

ED 251 860

Tulis, Helen B. "Dramas of Aging." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

Objectives

To give students an opportunity to interact with older people and share their experiences through skits and descriptive essays.

Procedures

Begin the activity by gathering materials and information on the biological, sociological, and psychological aspects of aging. Include short stories, poems, news stories, and magazine articles and perhaps make reading assignments prior to the discussion.

- As a class, discuss the aging process. What are the various problems of growing older? What are the advantages? What physical ailments can growing older bring?
- If you have seen the film *On Golden Pond,* discuss the special bond that can develop between the old and the young.
- Interview an active and productive older citizen.

The interviews can be done individually or as a class.

- Form groups of four to six and write a skit based on the elderly. Such stories might deal with an older person forced to retire against his/her wishes, a grandparent whose children and grandchildren are unprepared for changes in the older person's health, or an older person who turns to counseling runaway children after retirement from the work force.
- Act out your skit before the entire class.

✎ As a class, discuss the various treatments of old age, and identify myths about aging. What can you do in your own life to keep those myths from being accepted as fact?

✎ In an essay, describe your feelings when interacting with elderly people or when viewing the class skits.

Results/Benefits

Students increase their understanding, knowledge, and respect for the elderly.

Comments/Notes:

Community Involvement

Out-of-State Pen Peers

Brief Description

Each student writes a letter to the chamber of commerce and to a high school in an out-of-state town of equivalent size to his/her own. Students share any responses they receive, submitting interesting ones to the school newspaper.

Objectives

To give students practice in writing and revising letters, and to help them get to know their community.

Procedures

Bring in individual state road maps and have each student select a different state.

- ✎ Use the population listings to find a city or town of equivalent size to your own.
- ✎ Draft a letter to the chamber of commerce in the selected town, requesting a city map, information about schools, and brochures about the region.
- ✎ In groups, critique and revise your letters, then mail them.
- ✎ When the requested information arrives, draft a letter to a counterpart class in a high school in your chosen town or city.
  1. Request more personal information about the school and community.
  2. Include a brief description of yourself and send your photograph.
  3. Describe your high school.
  4. Include information about the points of interest, geographical features, history, climate, ethnic background, and economic makeup of your own community. This information can be gathered from your parents and other community members and from library research that includes newspapers, local histories, and reports of local government agencies.

Source

ED 251 860

Rutledge, Nancy. "Writing to the Nation." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

- ✎ In groups, critique and revise your letters, then mail them.
- ✎ Exchange responses to your letters and submit one or two of the most interesting to the school newspaper.

If someone receives a personal reply from a student, the class as a whole might draft a letter in response. If several personal letters are received, students might work in small groups to answer the letters. A follow-up assignment might include an essay evaluating and measuring students' personal responses to the letter-writing project.

Comments/Notes:

Community Involvement

Tourist Guide Fund-Raiser

Source

ED 251 860

Prosser, Kay. "Hometown Travel Guide." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

Brief Description

After your students discuss what their town or city can offer tourists, the class produces a pamphlet for teenage visitors.

Objectives

To encourage students to write clearly, accurately, and concisely, and to teach students to work cooperatively on a group project.

Procedures

The project will take about five weeks to complete. Before initiating it, obtain your principal's permission to conduct a survey, to solicit donations from the owners of local points of interest, to hold a fund-raising event, and to print a pamphlet.

Ask students to describe some of the places where they have vacationed and to discuss why people take vacations. Talk about whether people might vacation in your community; have students suggest what your town or city can offer tourists, particularly teenagers. Then make the assignment: The class is to produce a pamphlet for teenage visitors.

The following steps worked well in one class. You and your students may wish to modify these procedures somewhat.

- As a class, survey 100 teenagers to learn their favorite restaurants, stores, hangouts, parks, and other places of interest.

- Tabulate the results. Select the top 15 or 20 attractions for an in-depth description and make a list of the other attractions.

A different approach may be to have students divide the attractions into categories and select the top two or three in each category for further description.

- Divide into groups of two or three and select several local points of interest to describe in detail.

- ✎ As a class, determine the type of information to list for the featured attractions, perhaps including hours, prices, features, and locations.

- ✎ In your group, role-play interviews with the owners or managers of the various points of interest so you will feel comfortable talking to these people.

- ✎ Conduct interviews with the owners or managers of the local attractions.

This step may be difficult if private transportation is necessary, but perhaps the interviews could take place over the weekend or by telephone from either the school or a student's home. Another idea is to arrange to have interviewees come to the classroom during class time.

- ✎ Working in your groups when your interviews are completed, write a paragraph for each of your local attractions, describing them for teenage visitors to your community.

Have one group or the class as a whole write an introduction to the guide.

- ✎ Exchange descriptions with another group and offer suggestions for revision. Return the descriptions and revise your group's descriptions accordingly.

One student group investigates the cost of printing the pamphlet in the graphic arts department or at a local printer. If the budget is limited, the students should also determine the price for photocopying the pamphlet from a typewritten copy.

- ✎ Meet a second time with the owners or managers of the featured local attractions to show them the final copy of the descriptive paragraph and to solicit donations for printing the pamphlet. (Some businesspeople might prefer at this time to sign a written commitment to donate.) Prepare a list of those businesses agreeing to help with the printing costs; include this list at the end of the pamphlet.

- ✎ As a class, brainstorm names for the pamphlet. Vote to determine the pamphlet's new title.

- ✎ Have artistic volunteers prepare a cover and a map showing the location of the main points of interest.

- ✎ Plan a fund-raising event to help with the printing costs—perhaps a paperback book sale for the other students or a community car wash. Proceeds from the event and the amount of business donations received will determine whether the pamphlet is to be printed or photocopied.

- ✎ As a class, determine the final layout for the pamphlet, and turn it over to the printer. If the pamphlet is to be photocopied, volunteers type the final copy, and the class helps with the proofreading.

- ✎ After the pamphlet is printed, distribute copies to all businesses and other places of interest mentioned in the pamphlet. Contact your chamber of commerce, local hotels and motels, and other local organizations that may wish to distribute the pamphlet free of charge.

Results/Benefits

Students get to know their community better and appreciate the activities and services that the community offers.

Comments/Notes:

Persuasion

Exploring Censorship

Source

CS 212 072

Swenson, Jackie E. "In Defense of a Challenged Book." In *The Best of "Notes Plus:" Practical Classroom Activities for Junior and Senior High School Students.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1989. 87 pp.

Brief Description

Students select a novel that has at some time suffered censorship attacks but is not censored in your district. They discuss possible reasons for the objections and then defend the work for classroom use.

Objectives

To open the eyes of the many students who are oblivious to the complexities of censorship and its potential impact on what they might, or might not, be permitted to read in school.

Procedures

Because students' initial reaction to a discussion of censorship tends to be "But it never happens here, does it?" begin by talking about works that have been challenged in your school and district, as well as what is going on around the state and country. Students' next reaction often is "Those people must be crazy."

Recognizing that some students and/or their parents may be sympathetic to the movement to challenge materials and practices, explain the honest, protective motives behind most challenges. Encourage students to realize that "those people' are, for the most part, truly concerned parents with a sincere desire to be responsible about what their children are exposed to in required reading.

This prewriting discussion helps the class approach the assignment with a serious attitude rather than a reactionary one, as they try to identify and understand both the reasons for censors' objections to certain works and the arguments that might be used in support of those works.

Reproduce articles on censorship and lists of challenged books to spark students' interest. An article in the September/October 1982 issue of *The Bloomsbury Review* entitled "Book Banning: Who Shall Determine the Right to Read?" really starts students thinking.

- ✎ Select a novel to examine in-depth that has at some time suffered attacks from censors. It must still be allowed for reading in your district. After examining possible reasons for the objections, you must defend the work for classroom use.
- ✎ Within three or four days, submit a thesis statement including author, title, potential censor's objections, and your own supporting attitude. This statement is to guide your work. As you read and plan, you may change your specific objections and arguments, but you may not change the work you are examining.

After discussing with students how to approach the writing, produce several possible patterns of organization for their assignment. Two workable ones appear below.

Organization A:

I. Introductory paragraph revealing the writer's stance

II. Potential/real objections

III. Arguments in favor of reading the work in schools

IV. Conclusion

Organization B:

I. Introductory paragraph previewing objections and revealing the writer's stance

II. Objection-by-objection explanation and refutation

III. Conclusion

The first pattern seems to work best for students who find the objections reasonable, irrefutable, or unrelated to the educational reasons involved in English teachers' selection of works for the classroom. ("Yes, foul language does exist in *The Catcher in the Rye;* however,....") This includes students who find themselves agreeing with the complaints but supporting the book in spite of the objections.

The second format works best for students who want to refute the objections as weak or shortsighted *as* they argue for the novel. ("The language is realistic, and reality in fiction serves a purpose.")

Students' original thought will be evident in many of the papers. Students may adopt the voice of a character in the novel, of the author, or of an imaginary English teacher who has received a challenge. Some papers may contain dialogue between schoolboard members or judges and potential censors.

Research

Date-of-Birth Events

Source

ED 251 860

Jones, V. Nell. "A Newsworthy Day." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

Brief Description

Students research the events which took place on the day they were born, interview a parent to find out what was going on in their household at that time, and write a descriptive paper about their date of birth, including a reference list.

Objective

To involve students personally in a library research activity by having them combine personal and historical information.

Procedures

Be prepared to spend several days in the library as students collect information on the events taking place on their birthdates.

- ✎ Locate newspapers from the day or week in which you were born and magazines from that week or month.
- ✎ Gather information on local, national, and international events and on topics of interest or controversy at that time, such as a presidential election campaign, a local baseball team's winning season, or different stands on a controversial issue like the Vietnam War.
- ✎ Also note advertisements and articles on the kinds of cars, clothing, entertainment, and so forth, that were popular at that time.

With younger students especially, be certain that they are familiar with the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and with the use of microfiche, if your library uses this format. Students may also need to use a larger, local library to locate appropriate references.

Hand out several library worksheets to each student and have students collect information from each source on a separate worksheet.

- ✎ List the title of the magazine or newspaper and the publication date at the top of the worksheet.

✎ Research the following topics, listing the article name, author if given, and page number for each bit of information you gather:

1. Major headlines (newspapers) or front cover headlines (magazines)
2. National events
3. International events
4. Local events (newspapers)
5. Editorial page topics
6. National and local sports events
   a. Seasonal sports
   b. Standings in leagues
   c. Who is playing what sport?
7. Entertainment
   a. Movies
   b. Theater
   c. Performers
   d. Music and groups
8. Fashions
   a. Advertisements
   b. Feature articles
9. Food news
10. Science and medical news
11. Economic news
12. Advertisements
    a. What kind?
    b. Subject matter
    c. Types and styles
13. Comic strips (newspapers)
    a. Comparison of quality
    b. Any still running in papers today?
14. Other topics or items of note

✎ For information on events closer to home, interview a parent about this very important date in history. If possible, interview, in person or by phone, a grandparent or another close relative or friend to gather information about this date from a different perspective.

✎ As a class, determine a list of interview questions, such as the following:

1. Where was I born?
2. What was the date and the day of the week?
3. What time was I born?
4. What were my birth weight and length?
5. What were you doing when you discovered that I was about to be born (or when you learned that I was ready for adoption)?
6. What do you remember about the events surrounding my birth (or adoption)?
7. How did you decide on my name?
8. What do you remember most about my first week at home?

✎ Once the interviews and library research are complete, combine personal and historical information to write a descriptive essay about your date of birth. Include a reference list.

A follow-up assignment might include an essay comparing some of the differences between the present day and the period in which the students were born or an essay on what would be different if they were growing up today.

Results/Benefits

Students find library research more appealing because it involves them personally.

Research

Investigating Science Fiction

Brief Description

Students trace the science fiction writer's research process, and they work backward from the finished product—a brief science fiction story—to an earlier point when the story was being researched.

Objectives

To help inexperienced writers overcome their fear of research, build their research skills, and generate interest in research by using science fiction, which is popular with high school students.

Procedures

The students need quick-to-read, contemporary science fiction stories that can be found in magazines such as Isaac Asimov's *Science Fiction Magazine, Science Fiction and Fantasy,* and *Analog.*

- Read a selection of stories, choose the one you like best, and reread it.
- During the second reading, focus on one aspect of the story which, because of its technical or arcane content, implies that the author needed to research the material. Isolate a research problem such as the one found in Richard P. Russo's story "Firebird Suite" (*Amazing,* Sept. 1981). The author had to research telekinesis and parapsychology to convince his readers that his character's ability to manipulate fire is intensified by electro-surgery.
- To become familiar with the areas the author must have gone through, go to the library and recreate the author's research by going through the card catalog, indexes, bibliographies, books, and journals.
- When finished investigating the research problem, move on to another, either in the same story or a new one.

Source

Zasadinski, Eugene. "Using Science Fiction to Build Research Skills," *English Journal,* v72 n4 p69-70, Apr 1983.

Results/Benefits

Students gain valuable practice in the methods of research, acquire knowledge, sharpen their critical faculties, generate new ideas, and reinforce procedures that will be useful in other research projects. They become interested in what they are doing, and find that research is challenging and intellectually stimulating, not tedious or forbidding.

Comments

As a class, students may enjoy sharing their findings with one another. Although this exercise does not include a writing requirement, students could turn in a written report of their findings, including the sources, for a grade. The exercise could also be used as a basis for having students write their own science fiction stories.

Comments/Notes:

Research

Planning a Road Trip

Brief Description

Students use various forms of written and oral communication, participate in independent research and group discussion, and learn—from the vantage point of a tourist—what is involved in planning and taking a trip to another state.

Source

CS 212 072

Gray, Peggy. "Travel in the U.S.A." In *The Best of "Notes Plus:" Practical Classroom Activities for Junior and Senior High School Students*. National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1989. 87 pp.

Objectives

To combine research, writing, and practical knowledge to involve students in the following: planning a two-week tour of a state, writing letters for information about a state, writing a thesis statement for a tour folder, preparing a workable budget for a trip, using a road atlas to plan and record travel routes, writing descriptively and imaginatively, and obtaining information from resources such as magazines, tour guides, atlases, newspapers, and other travelers.

Procedures

Give students a deadline several months ahead, allotting a few days in the beginning for reviewing and practicing writing business letters. Go over the objectives with the students as an overview of the project. Recommend possible resources to your students, such as *National Geographic, Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Southern Living, Travel and Leisure,* road atlases, travel files in public libraries, travel agents, travel brochures and booklets provided by travel agencies, the travel section of major newspapers, state tourist bureaus, encyclopedias, and members of travel clubs or other people who have traveled extensively.

Give each student the list of required guidelines below. Go over each task on the list and answer questions before students begin work. Much of the work must be completed outside of the classroom. For help in pursuing particular tasks, students meet in small discussion groups in class at designated times throughout the project. Periodically ask students to bring in their work for proofreading and editing in peer writing groups and for your comments and suggestions. At these checkpoints, help students who are getting behind or are in need of additional direction.

Guidelines for a "Travel in the U.S.A." Project

✎ In this project, you will plan and take an imaginary trip to another state. Select a state that you have not visited and would like to visit or one that you have visited but know little about.

✎ To request information about travel and tourism, write a letter to the state's travel bureau in the capital city and to the chambers of commerce of any cities in which you are interested. Specifically, ask for information and literature on overnight accommodations, state and national parks, wildlife refuges, museums, historical sites, and other points of interest. (As you research your state and find references to specific places you might like to visit, jot down the names and addresses, and write to request information.) Remember to keep for your travel folder a copy of any letters you write.

✎ Take notes on your chosen state from *at least* five sources. Use at least two different encyclopedias, an atlas, one book, and one periodical. Copy the notes onto index cards, using one side only. State your source for each; include titles of books, articles, or chapters, publishers, dates of publication, and page numbers. You might want to research some of the following questions about your state:

What are the best-known towns or cities, and what makes them notable?

What are the state's major and minor industries?

What are the bordering states?

What are the best-known historical sites and the most popular recreational sites?

What are the names and locations of well-known schools?

What is the average temperature for each season?

What are the names and occupations of several famous people from the state?

✎ Write a thesis statement one-half page in length in which you explain your reasons for wanting to visit this state and what you plan to do on your trip. Include both educational and recreational plans. This page will be the first page of your travel folder.

✎ Write a one- to two-page paper on the geographical features of the state. Compare several areas within the state as to geography, temperature, precipitation, and other factors.

✎ Write a detailed travel itinerary for your proposed trip, specifying dates, times, places, and activities.

✎ Decide how you will get to and from your destination. If you choose to fly, call a travel agent and find out the cheapest round-trip fare, whether the flight is direct or includes a stopover or change of planes, and the times of departure and arrival. If you plan to take a bus or a train, you may be able to obtain your information from a travel agent, or you may have to call the bus or train station. If you plan to travel by car, use the car's mileage per gallon, the distance, and current gas prices to figure out how much the trip will cost. Also determine how long it will take to reach your destination.

✎ Prepare an accurate budget for your trip. Allow yourself $2,000 and plan to return home with *no more* than $50. Your transportation to and from your destination, whether plane, train, bus, or car, must come out of this $2,000. Remember to allow for such things as meals and snacks; tips in restaurants, airports, and hotels; car rentals; bus or taxi rides within cities; tickets for movies, plays, or other forms of entertainment; souvenirs; postage; telephone charges; emergencies; and so on.

✎ Make a list of what you plan to pack, keeping in mind the expected weather and the kinds of activities you have planned. If you plan to fly, find out the current height and weight restrictions for luggage and plan your packing accordingly.

✎ Write a daily personal diary for the duration of your trip. Include anecdotes about your adventures, descriptions of what you enjoyed the most, and notes on what you would do differently next time.

✎ Write a letter to a friend at home about an exciting event from your trip.

✎ Write a letter to your parents, a relative, or a teacher describing a historical point of interest from your trip.

✎ Prepare a picture scrapbook of your trip, using pictures cut out of travel brochures and magazines and photocopied from books. Write a caption for each picture.

✎ Write a short story about someone you met on your trip. Describe the person in detail, and write about one or more memorable incidents involving this person.

- ✎ Write a paragraph or poem about your trip, focusing on sights and sounds particular to the state you visited.
- ✎ Draw or trace a map of the state, indicating the capital and the points of interest that you visited. Plot your route in red.
- ✎ Collect your completed assignments together in a travel folder and prepare a table of contents.

After the projects are completed and the results are assembled in travel folders, set aside several class periods for the sharing of folders within and between classes.

Comments/Notes:

Creative

Imagery

Four Imagination Exercises

Source

Berry, John. "From a Teacher's Notebook—13: Explorations. Poetic Writing with Upper Juniors," *Use of English*, v34 n3 p34-39, Sum 1983.

Brief Description

Students are guided through a series of "imagination exercises" during which they write down what they are imagining.

Objectives

To give students an insight into the state of concentrated imagining—the poetic state of mind—and to induce the simultaneous wording of that imagining.

Procedures

In the first exercise, you will be focusing the students' attention on some single object or picture. One point of focus to begin with can be the palm of the hand. Do the exercise with them to hold their interest. To begin the exercise, hush the students to slow down the class until all students are silent. Allow your voice to become gradually softer to enhance the mood.

> ✎ Hold your hand before you, palm up. Look into it. Study it closely. Listen to the sounds inside the room. Listen to the sounds outside the room. When you are quite quiet, start to write down everything you notice about the hand. Pay particular attention to what you are reminded of as you concentrate, and write these ideas down.

In the second exercise, you will be focusing their attention on some imaginary picture in a slow, steady, rhythmic voice. Hush the students as before. After a moment's suspense, slowly and quietly say "Imagine," in a tone of voice which suggests "Once upon a time."

> ✎ Imagine. You are sitting on a rock—a hard, bumpy rock—looking into a calm pool. Write something about light and reflection in the pool. Write about what you can see at the bottom of the pool. Is there anything happening in the pool? Find something in this scene that reminds you of something else and finish with thoughts about that.

In the third exercise, students explore their mental pictures on their own with less teacher guidance.

✎ Imagine that you are on a beach at night. Describe the sound of the sea. Write something about lights. Now go on exploring and moving around this picture in your head. Write down what you see in this imaginary picture as images occur to you. Go on writing down what you see, smell, and hear. Write what you think about these sensations. Dwell upon and develop whatever might be worth developing. Write until you come to the end of what interests you. Stop when you come to a natural finishing place.

Another exercise might be to allow each student to find his/her own inner pictures, scenes, or objects. As a follow-up exercise, you may want to have students build upon the foundation of a previous short exercise with something freer and longer.

Results/Benefits

A student's writing becomes the work of the whole personality and becomes involved with personal emotion. Students become more imaginatively self-aware and better able to word mental pictures and emotional associations as they arise.

Comments/Notes:

Imagery

Writing from the Mind's Eye

Source

ED 237 997

Lawrence, Robert A. "The Where Exercise: Seeing in Writing." Paper presented at the National Conference on Developmental Education, 1981. 7 pp.

Brief Description

Given a series of locations, students write down three objects they "see" in each location. Students are then given a writing assignment based on the images seen in one of the locations.

Objectives

To develop the students' ability to picture what they read, and to use sensory detail in their descriptive writing.

Procedures

Coaching is crucial to the success of this exercise. You must encourage students to see vividly the locations you give them in all four sessions. Following each session, coach them during a readback of their responses to deepen their overall concentration and to draw connections between seeing and writing. Vary the response pattern as follows: around the room in order, half the class, the other half, volunteers, selected readers, and combinations thereof. A circular or semi-circular seating arrangement works best.

Begin with a simple definition of seeing—picturing something in the mind as clearly as you would in a dream. For example, as you sit in the classroom, you can see another place: your room at home, your car, your favorite hangout, etc. Emphasize that seeing is important in descriptive writing.

Session One

✎ As you picture the following locations, write down three objects you see there. Do not write something down just because you know it *should* be there; make sure you *see* the objects.

1. jail
2. basement
3. cave
4. boxcar
5. child's bedroom

As they see and write, coach students with statements such as "Use your imagination. Look around; there is plenty there. Trust the sight. Let your eyes roam around the place. You might see many objects, but be aware of the objects that capture your attention. If you have already written down three objects, see what else is there."

To begin the first readback, tell the students the following:

✎ You are going to share your responses with the class. When you hear about an object from someone else's sight, try to see it. It may fit into your picture and change the sight you have, or it may give rise to a whole new sight.

During readback, coach students in a number of ways: by asking them if they notice any differences between two locations, such as between jail and basement; by pointing out that certain places, such as caves, have symbolic meanings for us; by showing them that well-chosen objects can create a sense of place in writing; by occasionally responding to a striking object with "I can really see that"; and by asking the class which objects in a particular location made them see the most.

Session Two

✎ As you picture the second set of locations, write down two objects that capture your attention right away. This time, however, let the third object be one that you do not notice right away, a surprise object. For instance, in a classroom you might notice the chalkboard erasers and fluorescent lights right away, but you do not notice the ventilator grill until you have looked around closely.

1. dormitory room
2. hospital room
3. attic
4. bathroom
5. mine
6. tower

During the readback, point out that both obvious and unexpected objects can create a sense of place.

Session Three

✎ With the next locations, write down two objects seen right away, one surprise object, one close-by sound (e.g., a creaking chair), and one far-off sound (e.g., echoing voices fading in the hallway).

1. tree house
2. tavern
3. saloon
4. greasy spoon restaurant

During readback, ask students who give vague sound responses to be more specific: "What kind of music is playing? What noise do the cards make when being shuffled?"

Session Four

✎ This time, write down an odor, a texture, a gesture, and a line of dialogue.

1. movie theater
2. dentist's office
3. alley
4. drugstore
5. supermarket
6. church

Time will probably run out before you get through all of these. Ask students to complete the following writing assignment at home—to produce good prose, not a catalog of perceptions.

✎ Choose the location that interested and challenged you the most. See it again at home. Become aware of even more details: other objects, colors, time of day, temperature, lighting, mood, and people—who they are, what they are saying, and their histories. Go right to whatever captures your attention and start writing. Let your pen move. Do not worry about spelling; you can check it when you proofread. You may write an essay, a story, a fantasy, or any other genre that you choose. See the place as you write, and get all that seeable, hearable, touchable, tasteable, smellable detail into the writing.

Results/Benefits

Students become better writers and readers as they are trained to see. They gain confidence in expressing themselves imaginatively, especially students who are weak in grammar and worried about making mistakes. The exercise is not fixed; it allows flexibility to experiment with new locations and perceptual demands.

Metaphor and Simile

Eliminating Tired Sayings

Brief Description

Students are given visual clues of worn-out expressions used frequently in speech, then write a series of sentences to describe certain settings or feelings, using strong figurative language.

Objective

To give students an opportunity to differentiate between fresh metaphors or similes that bring life to writing and "dead fish"—those trite, tired sayings that no longer stir up strong, visual images.

Procedures

Bring the following items to class: a picture frame, a wood chip, a tea cup and saucer, a picture of a pig, and a book with a cover. Tell students that you are going to give them visual clues that will enable them to identify trite, worn-out expressions they will want to avoid in their writing. Explain that these phrases are so familiar that they no longer prompt visual images in our minds and do not cause us to think about the description in a new or different way. Because we use these expressions frequently in speech, students will probably have many more to add to the list.

1. Clue: Hold a picture frame in front of your face and smile.
   Expression: As pretty as a picture

2. Clue: Place a chip of wood on your shoulder.
   Expression: A chip on your shoulder

3. Clue: Hold a tea cup and saucer and take a sip.
   Expression: Just my cup of tea

4. Clue: Show a picture of a pig or draw one on the chalkboard.
   Expression: As fat as a pig

5. Clue: Take off a book cover and examine it. Examine the book.
   Expression: You can't judge a book by its cover.

Source

ED 283 145

Robitaille, Marilyn M. "Using the Lesson Cycle in Teaching Composition: A Plan for Creativity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 29 pp.

Point out how easily identifiable the expressions are or at least how familiar they are. Discuss the following questions with the class:

- ✎ Why do these expressions no longer evoke strong visual images in a reader's mind?
- ✎ Is there a way to enhance descriptive writing with fresh metaphors and similes?

Provide formal definitions of "metaphor" and "simile," if necessary. Use examples of descriptive passages from literature or poetry that students have read in class to illustrate fresh images.

- ✎ Complete the following sentences with fresh metaphors or similes. Do not write any "dead fish."
  1. Sleeping in my room is like....
  2. This class is like....
  3. After the paper was returned, he felt like....
  4. The experience was as unpleasant as....
  5. When he looked into her eyes and said "I love you!" she felt as though....
- ✎ Check the success of your images with a partner. Are the expressions fresh? How effectively do they paint mental images for the reader? Any dead fish?
- ✎ Choose the most successful of these five, read it aloud, and write it on the chalkboard.
- ✎ Write a sentence to describe each of the following, and create fresh similes or metaphors: a loud car engine, a ghost, clouds, a freshly baked turkey, silence, a laugh, an old man's walk, a baby's smile, pain, and a forest fire.
- ✎ Use one of the sentences from the exercise above to write a paragraph or two to describe that person or thing. The description must include the fresh metaphor or simile written during individual practice.

Results/Benefits

Students understand why dead-fish figures of speech are ineffective in writing. Wanting to avoid "fishiness" in future writing assignments, your students will create fresh metaphors and similes.

Metaphor and Simile

Observations of Grapes

Brief Description

Students carefully examine a small bunch of grapes, write about grapes, and share their responses with the class.

Objectives

To point out that even familiar objects have secrets that are revealed only upon close observation, and to demonstrate how to use something real as a basis for metaphors and comparison.

Procedures

Open the lesson by discussing the question "If you had to sacrifice one of your senses, which one would you give up and why?" Give each student a small bunch of at least four grapes. An observation sheet, containing something like the following, can be given to each student. Meditation on the grapes is to be individual and silent.

- ✎ Examine your bunch of grapes carefully, as if you had never seen grapes before in your life.
- ✎ Silently do the following with your grapes and *take notes after each step:*

1. Examine them visually very carefully.
2. Pull one grape off its stem and peel it.
3. Smell the grape.
4. Hold the peeled grape up to the brightest light available and look through it.
5. Eat the peeled grape.
6. Eat an unpeeled grape.
7. Squash a grape with your fingers.
8. If there are seeds, examine them visually and taste one.
9. Listen to the grapes.

Source

ED 298 500

Decker, Norma; Shirley, Kathy. "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School: A Research-Based Writing Process Curriculum." 1985. 94 pp.

✎ After completing the above examination, write creative answers to the following requests for information and analogies:

1. Describe a grape to someone who has never seen one.
2. A grape is to a bunch of grapes as a _____ is to a _____.
3. A peeled grape held up to the light is like a _____.
4. List one or two things you discovered about grapes that you never knew before.
5. Peeling a grape is like _____.
6. The smell of a grape is like _____.
7. My favorite recreational activity is squashing grapes because it is like _____.
8. The taste of a grape is to canned grape juice as _____ is to _____.
9. I am like a grape in that _____.
10. A grape is about to be eaten. If it could talk, what would be its last words?
11. What is the sound of a grape?

Share the varied answers with the class. If the answers are not particularly inventive, try some group brainstorming to improve them. Ask if anyone learned anything about creative writing from the grape meditations. The general level of writing will probably be more creative than with a normal assignment. Students could be given a follow-up assignment to write a creative sentence, paragraph, poem, or story, using the grape as a central image or character.

Writing Prompts

Effects of Clothing on Our Attitudes

Brief Description

Students use the topic of clothing to complete six writing assignments: an essay, an analysis, a character sketch, a lost-and-found notice, a dialogue, and a description.

Objective

To offer students an opportunity to explore the puzzling effects of clothes in our lives and in literature.

Procedures

- ✎ Share an experience or anecdote that reveals the importance of a specific article of clothing in your life. Present it in an essay or narrative.

As a first step, ask students to share their ideas orally in small groups. After they have talked about their experiences and heard about the experiences of others, they will be better equipped to present their own experience or anecdote as a personal essay or narrative.

Assign one or more short stories in which an article of clothing has special significance in revealing the traits or personality of a particular character, for example, the fur piece in Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill."

- ✎ Prepare a written analysis of why clothing is so important to the character.

The narrow focus of this analysis helps students know what elements to discuss.

- ✎ Write a character sketch in which details of clothing are central to the creation of character.

- ✎ Write a one-paragraph lost-and-found notice for an article of clothing you are wearing. Accurate identification of the article from this description is essential.

Source

CS 212 072

Groski, L. D.; Stevens, Shirley S. "The Clothesline." In *The Best of "Notes Plus:" Practical Classroom Activities for Junior and Senior High School Students.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1989. 87 pp.

Shoes are a particularly successful choice because so many students will be wearing running shoes with distinctive markings. Share these descriptions aloud, asking the class to identify the wearer of each item described.

✎ Write a dialogue between two teenagers in which they talk about why they "must have" a particular item of clothing that they cannot afford. Make the dialogue express the values of the speakers.

As an alternate assignment, students may write a dialogue between a teen and a parent in which the teen argues for the purchase, and the parent counters.

Cut small pictures of people from magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek,* and paste them on index cards. Choose pictures of authors, executives, criminals, government officials, and foreign dignitaries. Avoid pictures of people that students would easily identify and pictures of professional models in advertisements.

✎ Pick a card and write a description of the person shown, basing the details solely on deductions made from the person's appearance.

The assignment provokes a lively follow-up discussion because students discover how other people's dress and physical appearance influence our attitudes.

Comments/Notes:

Writing Prompts

Poetry by Candlelight

Brief Description

Students write poems while listening to "mood music" in a darkened classroom illuminated by candles.

Objective

To encourage student poetry writing.

Procedures

Pick a gray day for this activity so that drawing the blinds will darken the room a bit. Find out in advance if there are restrictions on the use of candles in the classroom. Have students bring to class candles of various sizes, shapes, and colors. Select several recordings to help set the mood—perhaps music representing darkness or a storm.

Begin by reviewing some of the concepts and terms of poetry: symbolism, imagery, metaphor/simile, and connotation/denotation. Light the candles and turn on the mood music. Place three headings on the chalkboard: literal function, imagery or mental picture, and symbolism.

✎ Discuss your reactions to, and perceptions of, the candles. Under which heading should your statement be classified?

List student responses and feelings on the chalkboard. Encourage widely different perceptions of the candles: "The candles glimmer and shimmer like a constellation of stars." "A candle could stand for goodness in the world, and darkness could be evil." "The candle melts so slowly that there is just a small trickle of liquid wax making its way down the candle." Discuss the significance of the comments in each category. Then turn down the lights and turn up the music.

✎ Make your own list of words associated with what you are seeing, smelling, feeling, and hearing.

✎ Use these vocabulary lists to write a poem about the candles or about any topic brought to mind by the candles.

✎ Read your poem aloud to the class (or in groups) as the music continues to play.

Source

ED 251 860

Summers, Sharon. "Candle Power." In *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book Two.* National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL, 1985. 64 pp. (For Book One, see ED 239 301.)

Writing Prompts

Students Become Writing Teachers

Source

Smolko, Nona K. "Sharing the Spotlight: An Experiment in Student-Centered Writing," *English Journal*, v75 n3 p83-84, Mar 1986.

Brief Description

Each student gives a 20-minute presentation during which he/she must elicit writing and sharing within the group.

Objectives

To give a student the opportunity to think up, prepare, and carry out a creative writing activity and to give the rest of the class frequent opportunities for short, in-class writing that might later be polished into more formal pieces.

Procedures

Spend most of one class period discussing the assignment and answering questions.

- For twenty minutes you will be in control of class procedures with only two restrictions: (1) you must use a catalyst for student writing—a poem, a song, an object, a picture, etc., and (2) your presentation must culminate with 5-10 minutes of student work, followed by informal sharing and reaction.
- Be clear about the purpose of your presentation. Make this focus clear to the rest of the class.
- You are responsible for all necessary technical arrangements: reserving the audio/video equipment, preparing material to be copied for the class, etc.

Let students know that you will be taking notes on each session and then talking with them about their experiences. Settle on a method for determining who-goes-when, and give students their presentation times at the outset so they can begin to prepare. When all the presentations have been given, take time to follow up with a full-class conversation about which methods have worked and which methods have not.

Results/Benefits

Students turn to their own special interests to offer their very best, trying to avoid doing something that resembles someone else's idea. Students become more involved in class time, write more often, and actively focus on specific, concrete use of language.

Student Publications

Designing a Magazine

Source

Boulanger, David R. "Making Magazines," *Exercise Exchange*, v33 n1 p15, Fall 1987.

Brief Description

Each student produces an issue of a focus-oriented magazine of his/her own design and shares it with the class.

Objectives

To motivate students to pursue their own interests and produce a creative prose project that they will be eager to share.

Procedures

- Produce an issue of a magazine of your own design.
- The magazine must have a particular focus, such as foreign cars, American art, or women's rights.
- The magazine must contain at least four articles that represent some of the following forms: description, narration, comparison and contrast, analysis, cause and effect, and definition.
- It must look like a magazine: advertisements, cover, and columns.
- You may clip pictures for advertisements and illustrations from "real" magazines or use your own snapshots, but you must write all the text in your advertisements.
- Paste your final copy on clean sheets of white typing paper.

Make two photocopies of each magazine, one to keep and grade and one for the student to share and display. Interest and emotions are usually so high at the end of this project that it takes at least a couple of classes for the students to read each other's work and discuss it.

Results/Benefits

The activity generated by this assignment creates a level of investment and ownership that produces excellent writing.

Annotated Bibliography of Related Resources in the ERIC Database

Documents cited in this section provide additional ideas and activities for teaching writing at the high school level. The ED numbers for sources in *Resources in Education* are included to enable you to go directly to microfiche collections, or to order from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS).

Acton, Karen; Griffith, Judy. Imagery: Activity Guide. 1980. 20 pp. [ED 239 203]
Presents an activity unit for teaching students to identify and use imagery in writing.

Allen, Sheilah. A Field-Based Experiment on Composition Writing. 1982. 7 pp. [ED 227 498]
Determines the effects of attitude and reading achievement on writing, to ascertain if intervention could improve writing achievement and attitude, and to predict success in the program on the basis of an attitude inventory that measured need for structure and tolerance of ambiguity. Finds that vocabulary scores and course marks were significantly correlated, students with high reading scores had low need for structure (and vice versa), and comprehension scores and attitude toward writing were significantly correlated.

Classic of the Month. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, Urbana, IL. 1984. 8 pp. [ED 241 933]
Presents three installments of Classic of the Month, a regular feature of the National Council of Teachers of English publication *Notes Plus*. Each installment of this feature is intended to provide teaching ideas related to a classic novel. Includes questions for class discussion, along with ideas for writing assignments, class projects, and small-group or individual projects.

Dixon, John; Stratta, Leslie. *Writing within Simulations Related to Social & Work Experiences.* Discussion Booklet 2, Series B: Writing 14 to 18. 1984. 33 pp. [ED 252 859]
Focuses on the use of simulations in secondary school writing classes. After guiding the teacher through five key questions that need to be addressed in the planning and carrying through of each simulation, the booklet presents four simulations, varying from simple to complex demands.

Duke, Charles R. An Introduction to a Re-search Writing. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northwest Regional Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1985. 14 pp. [ED 260 438]
Asserts that to change the perceptions that research writing is somehow different from other writing, teachers need to place more emphasis on the search in student research papers. An intermediate assignment can help bridge the gap between the totally personal search and the more formal and traditional research paper approach. The assignment asks students to look at events, people, places, and things that existed at the time the students were born and at similar events, people, places, and things that exist now. Their assignment is to identify clues in the materials they examine that suggest possible contrasts or comparisons between the two time periods and to build a case for the significance of these contrasts and comparisons.

Houlette, Forrest; Ramsey, Paige A. Teaching the Placement of Given and New Information with Sentence Combining. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1979. 39 pp. [ED 232 146]
Argues that teaching strategies are needed that can exercise their competence with the aim of improving their performance. Suggests that signalled and unsignalled sentence-combining exercises can accomplish this goal. Signalled exercises require the students, by asking them to treat some information as given, to integrate the kernels into a context during production. Unsignalled exercises are designed to teach the linguistic markers that signal certain words or phrases as new or given.

Idea Exchange for English Teachers. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1983. 198 pp. [ED 228 642]

Contains 200 activities in the following categories: (1) getting ready to write; (2) expressive writing, including autobiographical and journal writing; (3) informative writing, including writing for readers other than the teacher, and research and the research paper; (4) tricks of the writing teacher's trade; (5) revision, review, and evaluation; (6) word study, vocabulary development, and spelling; (7) punctuation and grammar; (8) speaking and listening; (9) newspapers, magazines, and the visual arts; (10) talking and writing about literature; and (11) classroom management, including organizing the classroom"the students, bulletin boards, and the first five minutes as well as the last.

Ideas from the Classroom. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, Urbana, IL. 1984. 17 pp. [ED 241 932]

Presents three installments of Ideas from the Classroom, a regular feature of the National Council of Teachers of English publication *Notes Plus.* Offers a variety of teacher-submitted activities for English and language arts instruction. Includes (1) nine writing exercises which are appropriate for the beginning of the school year, (2) twenty activities and games that focus on words, and (3) eight activities for talking and writing about literature.

Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas. Book One. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1984. 63 pp. [ED 239 301]

Presents teaching activities that enliven the secondary school language arts classroom, engage student interest, and help teachers reflect on their teaching as part of their continued professional growth. Divides activities into four sections: (1) literature, (2) writing assignments, (3) prewriting and polishing activities, and (4) fun and functional projects, strategies, and diversions.

Marik, Ray. *Special Education Students Write: Classroom Activities and Assignments. Writing Teachers at Work.* Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1982. 154 pp. [ED 251 837; paper copy not available from EDRS]

Recounts the struggles and successes of one Seattle School District secondary school composition teacher guiding special education students through the writing process. Includes writing samples of the students, sample assignment sheets, descriptions of classroom activities, and an explanation of the methodology used in guiding the students through the process.

Marshall, James D. The Effects of Writing on Students' Understanding of Literary Texts. Paper presented at the 74th Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1984. 24 pp. [ED 252 842]

Investigates the role that writing plays in eleventh grade students' understanding of literary texts. Finds that the positive effects of extended writing versus restricted writing increased over time. At all three levels (generalization, description, and interpretation), when students wrote extensively about a story in either a personal or a formal mode, they scored better on the posttests than when they wrote in a restricted mode.

Nugent, Susan Monroe, ed. *Synthesize, Synthesize, Synthesize.* 1987. 48 pp. [ED 281 212]

Focusing on synthesis"the ability to recognize and create new ideas that subsume and relate to others"as one of the most sophisticated skills writers can attain, the articles in this journal present many ideas for teaching synthesis and a number of classroom approaches that combine the study of English with other fields.

Philbin, Meg; Phillips, Rebecca. Fiction about Hate Groups: A Case Study Approach. 1988. 9 pp. [ED 292 130]

Faced with the task of reading literature on themes perhaps foreign to their own experience, students can explore their reactions to these issues by using a case study approach, bridging the gap between the novel and the student's own experience. In a case study, the issue of racial hatred can be objectively discussed as students gather evidence (either fictional or factual) and draw conclusions based upon it, leading to a cause-and-effect analysis of the event described. After considering their affective responses, students can approach the issue by writing a formal case study, thereby permitting the expression of emotional and intellectual reactions.

Rodine, Jody A. Hook 'Em Using the Newspaper as Bait. Paper presented at the Regional Spring Conference of the Colorado Language Arts Society, 1987. 42 pp. [ED 296 337]

Focuses on the newspaper as a teaching tool in three broad areas: (1) Language Arts, (2) Reading and Language, and (3) Reading, Language, and Math.

Roellich, Carol; Carlson, Diana M. Teaching Writing Easily and Effectively to Get Results. Part I: The Analysis Approach, A Model. Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference, 1983. 13 pp. [ED 233 371]

Secondary school teachers can present the process of writing compositions simply and effectively by adopting three tools: the positive approach, the easy three-step analysis process, and the brainstorm outline. Using the positive approach, teachers first convince students that writing effectively is important to them"it gives them the power to think more clearly and to influence others' thinking. Next, teachers generate a positive learning atmosphere, helping students to feel good about their writing. Then teachers explain the three-step analysis process"make a statement, give examples, and explain proofs"and show how this process can be applied to a simple assignment, such as analyzing how commercials use gimmicks to sell products. By adapting the brainstorm outline to their topics, teachers help students generate new ideas.

Smagorinsky, Peter; and others. *Explorations: Introductory Activities for Literature and Composition, 7-12.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, Urbana, IL; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL. 1987. 55 pp. [ED 279 008]

Noting that teachers sometimes fail to draw on students' prior knowledge, this guide focuses on helping teachers both to think about the cognitive processes involved in learning and to design activities that provide students with a solid introduction to various learning tasks. Discusses reading comprehension activities that promote writing ability and how teachers can prepare students to think and write about issues raised in literary texts.

Small, Robert C., Jr. Linguistics in the English Class. Paper presented at the 77th Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1987. 18 pp. [ED 289 171]

Designed for secondary school English teachers who want to help their students develop enthusiasm for words, their histories, and the way language structures words to produce meaning, this paper offers suggestions for a program of study employing dictionary projects and personal experience. Describes making a class dictionary of teen language, involving such activities as the following: (1) posting words on a class bulletin board, (2) interviewing students and parents to gather words, (3) examining dictionaries to see what words they contain, (4) examining textbooks for ways to present new terms, (5) examining dictionary histories, (6) deciding how to select words, (7) writing definitions, (8) determining spellings and variant spellings as well as pronunciation and usage, (9) debating decisions of correctness versus majority rule, and (10) accounting for changes in meanings of various words.

Smith, Eugene. The Literature Classroom as a Community of Interpreters. 1980. 20 pp. [ED 240 599]

Presents ways of extending high school students' imaginative grasp of human experience by reflecting the reader-response theory of literature"a theory suggesting that literature is made dynamic through interaction between reader and text. Suggests that student writing, from initial draft, to sharing with peers, to final revision, should help students relate experiences in the novel with their own lives.

Stewart Dore, Nea. Where Is the Learning We Have Lost in Information? Strategies for Effective Reading in Content Areas. Paper presented at the 9th World Congress on Reading, 1982. 35 pp. [ED 232 138]

The Effective Reading in Content Areas (ERICA) teaching model comprises four stages: preparing for reading, thinking through information, extracting and organizing information, and translating information. Activities in the fourth stage, translating information, help students explore subject information through writing in terms of contexts of situation, role, audience, purpose, and form, and through the processes involved in drafting, reviewing, redrafting, editing, and publishing a range of writing.

Upton, James. Beyond Correctness: Context-Based Response from the Writing Center. 1987. 23 pp. [ED 290 158]

Suggests that in order for students to be helped effectively to complete their writings successfully, writing centers in schools need to become more adept at context-based response. That is, writing centers need to focus not just on clarity and correctness of writing but also on the content of the assignment that students are working on. Includes copies of several writing assignment worksheets and a reader evaluation sheet, as well as guidelines and suggested uses for these.

Wright, Anne. Computers as Instructional Aids. Version of a paper presented at the Spring Conference of the Greater St. Louis English Teachers Association, 1986. 6 pp. [ED 275 000]

The use of microcomputers as word processors for writing papers is commonplace in English departments, but there are many less well-known uses that English teachers can make of the computer. For example, word processing programs can be used to teach sentence combining. Computers are also helpful for demonstrating revision and group composing, with teachers going through the processes with students to help them understand the changes that can easily be manipulated on the screen.

Writing Assignment of the Month. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, Urbana, IL. 1984. 9 pp. [ED 241 931]

Presents three installments of Writing Assignment of the Month, a regular feature of the National Council of Teachers of English publication *Notes Plus*. Describes writing exercises which have proven to be successful in the classroom. Gives suggestions for introducing students to mapping, a prewriting technique which uses graphic representations of information as an aid in organizing ideas for written and oral compositions. Offers detailed instructions for a two-week writing unit which uses comparisons of film critiques from a variety of publications to teach writing and research skills. Describes two methods of using writing as a means of enhancing learning across the curriculum.

Writing Exercises for High School Students **provides lessons on creative writing, expository writing, descriptive writing, and audience/voice. Activities used throughout the various lessons include:**

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