DOCUMENT RESUME

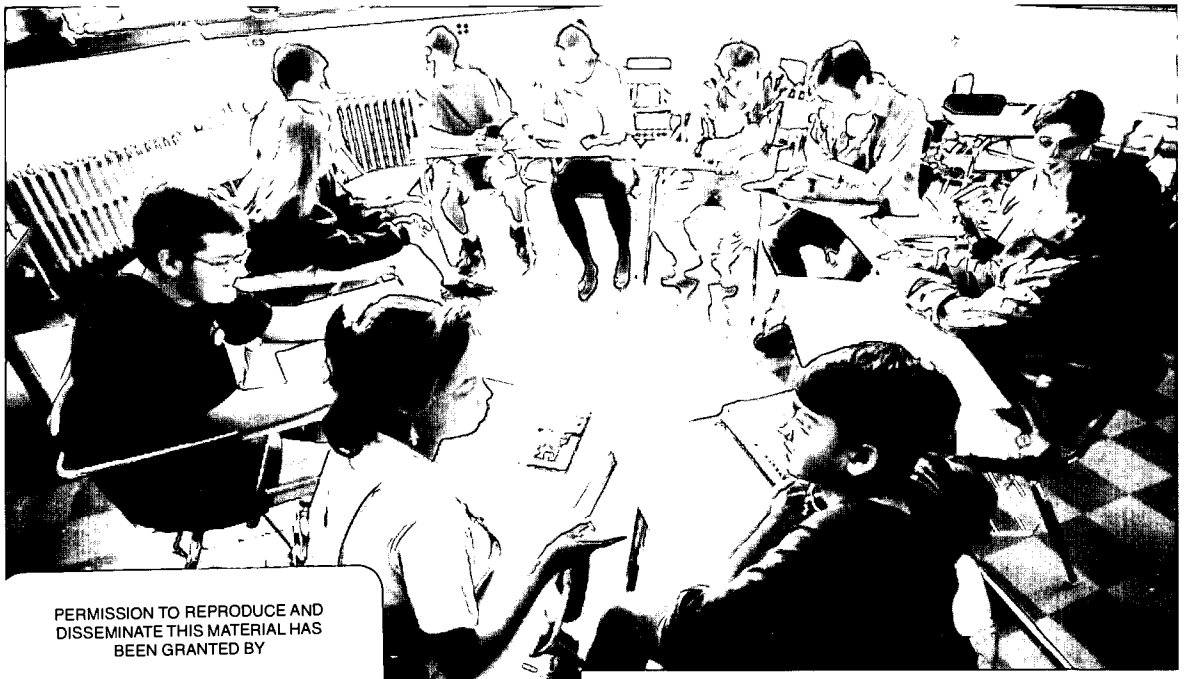
ED 461 873 CS 217 824

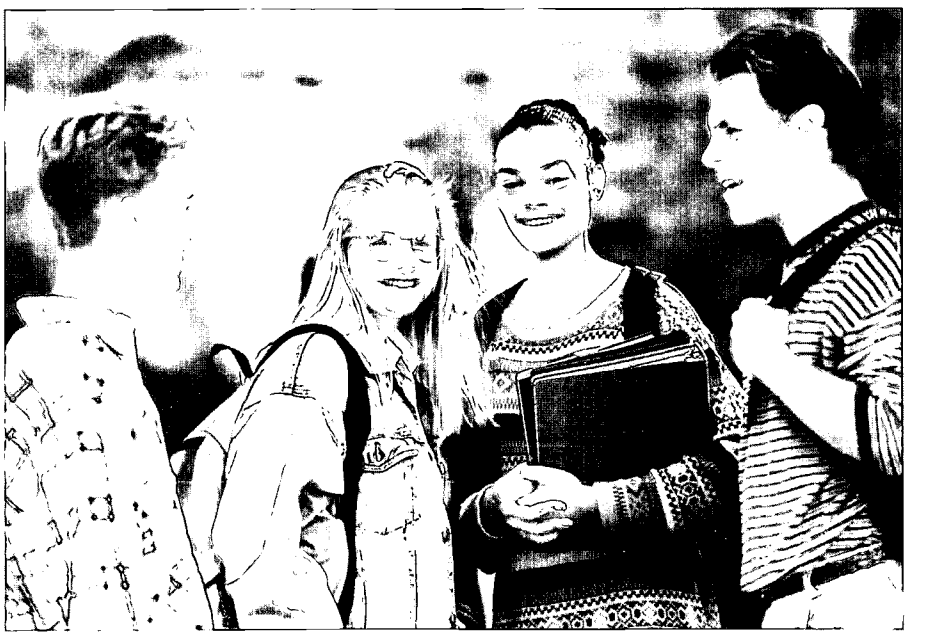
TITLE	MORE Lesson Plans for Substitute Teachers: Classroom-Tested Activities from the National Council of Teachers of English.
INSTITUTION	National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.
ISBN	ISBN-0-8141-3217-0
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	46p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096 (Stock No. 32170: $11.95 members, $15.95 nonmembers). Tel: 800-369-6283 (Toll Free); Web site http://www.ncte.org.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020) -- Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Active Learning; Characterization; Class Activities; High Schools; *Language Arts; Learning Activities; *Lesson Plans; Middle Schools; Poetry; *Teacher Developed Materials
IDENTIFIERS	Ideas

ABSTRACT

This resource brings together classroom-tested, successful teaching ideas and activities used by real teachers. The 25 activities in the resource--most requiring little to no advance preparation--involve middle school and high school students in meaningful, active learning on topics in language arts that include public speaking, language exploration/vocabulary, prewriting/writing, writing: developing a character, and poetry. Each lesson in the resource is generally adapted for approximately one class period. None of these lessons requires technical knowledge of literary concepts or demands expert pedagogical skills. A highly experienced substitute teacher might well see opportunities to enhance the activities in the resource, to extend the prewriting discussion, or to add small group work and peer editing to composition assignments. (NKA)

MORE Lesson Plans for Substitute Teachers





Classroom-Tested Activities from the National Council of Teachers of English

MORE Lesson Plans for Substitute Teachers

Classroom-Tested Activities from the National Council of Teachers of English

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096

Staff Editors: Felice A. Kaufmann and Kurt Austin

Cover Design: Tom Jaczak

Cover Photos: Clockwise from upper left: 1. Thompson-McClellan Photography; 2. EyeWire; 3. Comstock, Inc.

Interior Design: Tom Kovacs for TGK Design

NCTE Stock Number: 32170-3050

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

More lesson plans for substitute teachers : classroom-tested activities from the National Council of Teachers of English.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-8141-3217-0
1. English language—Study and teaching (Secondary) 2. Language arts (Secondary) 3. Lesson planning. I. National Council of Teachers of English.
LB1631 .M595 2002
428′.0071′273—dc21

2001008467

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INTRODUCTION

In 1989, NCTE published its first collection of lesson plans for the substitute teacher. Garnered from various issues of *Classroom Notes Plus* (simply called *NOTES Plus* at that time), this collection proved to be immensely helpful to and popular with English teachers. The usefulness of *Substitute Teachers' Lesson Plans* has encouraged us to produce this second volume, containing twenty-five *more* teaching suggestions. Our purpose continues to be the same: to offer the school principal, the regular English teacher, and the substitute teacher a way to maintain the continuity and integrity of the English class on the days when the regular teacher is absent.

Absences, as we know, happen. And generally, neither the regular teacher nor the substitute can predict or prepare for them. In such a situation, a collection such as this one offers a solution—an opportunity for significant learning activity rather than busy work during the regular teacher's absence. The materials included here are all educationally sound and are drawn from the experience of classroom teachers. Having appeared in the journal *Classroom Notes Plus* and the annual book *Ideas Plus,* these materials have been further tried and tested by other English teachers. Each lesson is generally adapted for approximately one class period. It can be adapted to various grade levels.

None of these lessons requires technical knowledge of literary concepts or demands expert pedagogical skills. The highly experienced substitute teacher might well see opportunities to enhance the activities, to extend the prewriting discussion, or to add small group work and peer editing to composition assignments. But by and large, the materials have been selected and adapted so that a nonspecialist can conduct lively and significant instruction in English.

The twenty-five lessons engage the student in the processes of speaking, listening, and writing through a range of activities, which include, among other things, exploring language, speech, vocabulary, poetry, and character sketches. The page size allows teachers and substitutes to photocopy the handouts conveniently for classroom distribution, thus making classroom management and implementation of the activities easier.

These are not lesson plans in the conventional sense—there is nothing formulaic about them. They are jargon-free, straightforward, classroom-tested materials. And they work. We encourage you to try them. We also encourage principals to provide copies for all English teachers to use when absences are anticipated, and to keep copies on hand for substitutes who need immediate help when unexpected absences occur. English teachers, knowing their own students and programs best, can review all of the activities and select those best suited for use in their absence, leaving instructions for

the substitute with the principal, department chair, or other appropriate colleague. Substitutes can keep copies as part of their repertoire of useful teaching ideas.

If you like the materials in this short volume, you will be interested in *Classroom Notes Plus* (www.ncte.org/notesplus) and *Ideas Plus* and other periodicals and books for middle school, junior high, and senior high school teachers from the National Council of Teachers of English. For further information, contact NCTE via our Web site at www.ncte.org, or write to NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096.

1 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Creating Stories to Explore Language

This activity invites students to use creative thinking skills to explore language. Prepare a "grab-bag" full of the names of common items written on pieces of paper (e.g., baseball cap, doorknob, etc.). Ask each student to pick one piece of paper from the bag. You may wish to pick one also, or have one ready beforehand, to demonstrate the activity with your item. Then, ask students to make up an outlandish story about the item chosen. For example, if they chose "stamp," they could tell a story about all of the places they had been as a stamp. Or they might provide models other than personification, for example, the story might be about a stamp that did not stick, resulting in the loss or delay of an important letter and the consequences.

Allow the students some time to think about the object and explore the different story possibilities. Then they can share them with their classmates and, if they choose, with the entire class. An alternative to make this activity more challenging for more advanced students is to ask them to make up the story spontaneously, with each student sharing his or her story with the class.

The use of an everyday, exaggerated story such as those the students tell one another really opens up their creative use of language.

April Kimble, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia

Two Truths and a Lie

Two Truths and a Lie is a storytelling game that we adapted for classroom use and have found very successful, particularly when we've used it as a beginning-of-the-year activity. Each participant tells three stories, only two of which can be true. Questions follow the stories and—when everyone has finished—participants guess the "lie."

For classroom use we begin by instructing students to generate vignettes of truths and lies over a broad range of topics. Typically, these include general categories, such as the following:

First memories
Strongest memory of childhood
"Believe it or not" tales of grade school
Stories of feats and accidents
Something I did when I was alone

Students have a prewriting period in which they can discuss possible topics, then ten minutes of quiet for each to write a first draft of a "truth." A small break provides time to pause or extend a draft; ten more minutes provides starter time for the lie, the fictional account.

Ultimately, each student has ten vignettes, half of which are truths. The student chooses two truths and one lie from these selections and polishes them for detail, development, and mechanics. The student labels the final written vignettes *A, B,* and *C.* Numbers may be substituted for student names to ensure privacy.

All the vignettes are taped to the wall of the classroom at shoulder height. Students read every selection as they walk around the room, recording their guesses of "truth" or "lie" on a worksheet they each carry. At the completion of this process, each author informs the class which of his or her selections are true and which is fictional. The students keep score of their worksheet guesses, and results are compared. Students can decide ahead of time to award points either for fooling others or for not being fooled.

The game has the advantage of being both a writing and an interpretive activity. Because students sketch more vignettes than they will eventually use, the structure of the assignment encourages a rapid generation of ideas in a criticism-free context. This is reinforced by the time limits, which work in free-writing fashion to accelerate drafting.

Moreover, because they are trying to fool their classmates, students select their vignettes and edit them with this audience in mind. Finally, the work of each student is published.

When guessing begins, the nature of the game shifts from composition to interpretation. Separating fiction from nonfiction points up distinctions between them, while the scoring process provides each author the opportunity to speak to his or her selections. We've learned to take our time with this step, allowing particularly good guessers to describe how they found the lie and encouraging discussion of how a particular writer was able to fool us.

Finally, one can't play Two Truths and a Lie without broaching a critical inquiry into the nature of fiction and nonfiction. Is fiction lying? Can one use it to tell the truth? Conversely, can nonfiction be used to lie? While the use of such questions depends on the age and grade level of the students, it is an accolade to the game that even the youngest of participants will raise them.

Steven VanderStaay and Mary Metzger, Iowa City, Iowa

Lies, Fibs, and Exaggerations

With a collection of colorful magazine pictures of people, animals, activities, or scenery, you can begin a language exercise that everyone can relate to, that gives students practice in using words and details creatively, and that results in humorous, imaginative stories to share with the class. In this exercise, students are encouraged to exaggerate in writing, with gusto!

First you need to introduce the topic of exaggeration. An entertaining way to do this is to say to the class, "Let me tell you about something that happened to me recently." Share a brief anecdote from your life, expanding on the truth and using hyperbole so as to make it wildly unbelievable. After you tell your story, enjoy students' laughter and incredulous looks, and then say, "Okay, I admit I exaggerated a bit. Here's what really happened," and tell them the more modest, true story. This will help illustrate for students the kinds of details and extreme language that can turn a simple story into a tall tale.

Next explain to students that they will be forming small groups and creating exaggerated stories themselves, using magazine pictures as a starting point. Students form small groups, select one picture for their group from the assembled magazine pictures, and brainstorm and write the story together, choosing words and details that will make it wild, crazy, and "over the top."

I usually collect pictures of landscapes and scenery and suggest that students start by pretending that "this is a photo of a trip you took together last summer." Students then create an outlandish story about the events of their trip, who went with them, what happened, how the situation resolved itself, and so on. However, any sorts of pictures and suggestions could be used to get the activity going—the main goal is to encourage students to use their imaginations, to work together in choosing details and writing descriptions, and to create some impressive tall tales!

Finally, in the liveliest part of this activity, the groups present their pictures and stories to the class, including the option of responding to questions from their classmates to clarify things like "exactly how long did it take you to climb that mountain?" and "how did you say that rescue helicopter found you again?"

Edie Leitner, Del Vallejo Middle School, San Bernardino, California

A Speech That's *Almost* Fun

One of students' worst fears is having to get up in front of the class. Worse still is having to tell about something from their own lives. To put my high school students more at ease, I've devised a speech assignment in which they tell about a life experience—but with a twist. This time, the life experience doesn't have to be true.

I ask the students to tell about something that happened in their lives or about something that sounds like it *might* have happened in their lives. They must use their most persuasive language. Either way, the story has to *sound* true, but the goal is to fool the audience.

The results of this assignment are amazing. Students are not as afraid to tell about themselves if they are trying to fool their friends. My class and I discovered that the most far-fetched story can be absolute fact, and the most simple and seemingly plausible of stories can be absolute fiction. As one student said at the end of his speech, "This thing was *almost* fun!"

Linda S. Gardill, Bedford High School, Bedford, Pennsylvania

A Personal Narrative Topic That Gives Students Choice

External tests that are fairly open-ended can be linked in enjoyable and relevant ways to student-centered teaching. The personal narrative, a piece of writing about one significant event from one's life, is a required entry for state-mandated writing portfolios in grades 4, 8, and 12 in Kentucky. Since this type of writing is stressed in both the target assessment years and nontarget years, developing writing topics that will give students choice is important.

While topics like "My Most Embarrassing Moment" and "A Christmas Memory" can certainly produce good personal narratives, sometimes students are blocked by these titles because they cannot think of anything truly embarrassing or a Christmas that really stands out. When every student is forced to write on one teacher-assigned topic, the level of writing sometimes suffers and so do portfolio scores. So how can we create choice?

One of the best topics I have come across for building choice into writing the personal narrative is a simple, fill-in-the-blank title: "A Time I Felt _____." I have used this topic successfully with many different grade levels, and it always seems to work. It usually takes only about five minutes of individual and/or group brainstorming to find more than enough words to complete the title and to suggest a multitude of possibilities for students to use to write about their personal experiences.

Below are some of the words that students have come up with, but let your students try to come up with their own lists.

Afraid
Lonely
Happy
Sad
Nervous
Left Out
Sick
Depressed
Grown Up
Scared
Anxious
Puzzled
Frustrated
Surprised
Tired
Defeated
Brave

Ken Spurlock, Letcher County Public Schools, Whitesburg, Kentucky

2 LANGUAGE EXPLORATION/ VOCABULARY

Brainstorming and Prewriting on Phobias

Students need to be comfortable with brainstorming about a topic. They need to be able to look at different aspects of a topic, to select specifics, to organize, draft, revise, and share their ideas. This prewriting and brainstorming activity provides practice in these areas.

Precomposing

1. Introduce the assignment: "Today we are going to write a short composition on 'Phobias and Fear.' You will be writing to inform your classmates about a specific phobia or fear in an informal way."
2. Write *Phobia (Fear)* on the chalkboard and ask students for a working definition of the word. Write students' suggestions on the chalkboard and then ask a volunteer to look up the word *phobia* in the dictionary and also write that definition on the board.
3. Ask students, "What do you think are the greatest fears that people have?" Make a list on the chalkboard and ask students to list on a piece of paper their rankings of the fears on our list, from greatest to least.
4. Copy onto the chalkboard the greatest fears from *The Book of Lists* (William Morrow, 1977) in order from greatest to least:

   Speaking before a group (41%)
   Heights (32%)
   Insects, bugs, spiders (22%)
   Deep water (22%)
   Sickness (19%)
   Death (19%)
   Flying (18%)
   Loneliness (14%)
   Dogs (11%)
   Driving/riding in a car (9%)
   Darkness (8%)
   Elevators (8%)
   Escalators (5%).

5. Talk with students about what they think causes these fears. Examples of typical answers might be: scared by spiders when young, stories of spiders laying eggs in people's ears while they were sleeping, shut up in a closet by an older brother or sister, being bitten by a dog when young, and so on.

Composing

The writing assignment might take one of several directions. Some of the possibilities are listed below:

1. Each student may be given a list of common phobias to research. The list below is taken from *Find Your Phobia* by Jim and James Windell (Oakland Press).

   Acrophobia—fear of heights
   Acarophobia—fear of insects
   Claustrophobia—fear of enclosed spaces
   Hydrophobia—fear of water
   Agoraphobia—fear of open spaces
   Aviophobia—fear of flying
   Gamophobia—fear of marriage
   Orinthophobia—fear of birds
   Ponophobia—fear of work
   Zoophobia—fear of animals
   Melissophobia—fear of bees
   Demophobia—fear of crowds
   Thanatophobia—fear of death
   Phagophobia—fear of eating
   Ichthyophobia—fear of fish
   Genophobia—fear of sex
   Arachneophobia—fear of spiders
   Ophidiophobia—fear of snakes
   Xenophobia—fear of strangers
   Gynophobia—fear of women
   Triskaidekaphobia—fear of the number thirteen
   Autophobia—fear of being alone
   Scopophobia—fear of being looked at
   Hygrophobia—fear of dampness
   Batrachnophobia—fear of frogs
   Peniaphobia—fear of poverty
   Aulophobia—fear of seeing, handling, or playing a flute or similar wind instrument.

Students may then be assigned an informal essay including the definition of one of the phobias, outstanding symptoms, and suggested steps to take to overcome this phobia.

2. Younger students may be asked to write about someone they know who has had a phobia and to describe how this person acted to avoid the frightening situation. (Students may write about themselves, if they are so inclined. Some may be a little reticent.)
3. Each student may be given a 3" x 5" card with a phobia written on it. They then are asked to brainstorm this phobia and write a description of a person who has this phobia. Students may make up their own phobias if they don't know the scientific name, for example, gatorphobia (fear of alligators), flowerphobia (fear of flowers), and so forth.
4. A class list of phobias may be compiled from those researched and duplicated for the class to share, or each student may do a short 3- to 5-minute oral presentation on their researched phobia.

John Cass, Pontiac School District, Pontiac, Michigan

Sniglets in the Classroom

In an effort to get my ninth-grade students to appreciate the genius of William Shakespeare before we begin reading *Romeo and Juliet,* I make use of comedian Rich Hall's sniglets in my classroom.

I inform students that Shakespeare is often considered one of the world's most successful word inventors of his time, coining such common words as *assassination, barefaced, bumps, gloomy,* and *suspicious.* I discuss the difficulties of finding words that exactly express one's intended meaning and use as an example the cliché that Inuits have many more words for snow than are found in the English language. The class then brainstorms about other limitations in our vocabulary, but they usually conclude that there are few things that go unnamed in our language.

At this point, I bring out a copy of Hall's *Unexplained Sniglets of the Universe* (Macmillan, 1986) to prove that there are still many things in this world that *do* lack a name. According to Hall, a sniglet is "any word that doesn't appear in the dictionary, but should" (p. 1). For example, using the family dog to remove crumbs that have dropped to the floor is defined as "barcuuming" (p. 18), the mysterious magnetic force that holds two or more Fig Newtons together is "figforce" (p. 35), and small pieces of tissue paper used to cover shaving wounds are "hemoplugs" (p. 41). Many of these definitions also come with accompanying illustrations.

Once students understand what a sniglet is, I give them some definitions from the book and ask them to come up with a sniglet of their own. Their favorite was the word coined for the gap in the dressing room curtain that can never be closed; Hall calls it a "peepola" (p. 61); my classes liked "sneakapeek" better.

Then I ask students to think about events or objects that lack a proper name and to come up with their own original sniglets. Two favorites of mine are new words for the squeaking noises of various footwear; one student termed it "shoesic," while another came up with "sneaksqueak."

When I display the student sniglets on a bulletin board, students eagerly crowd around it to admire one another's creations. It is generally one of the most popular bulletin boards of the school year.

This exercise helps students better understand the link between signifier and signified, the role onomatopoeia plays in language development, and the flexibility of language. It stretches the imagination and helps students appreciate the difficulties that a writer can encounter in striving for precise expression. It also demonstrates how much fun our language can be.

Barbara Roosevelt, Chatham High School, Chatham, New York

Prereading Shakespeare

How many of us have had the experience of introducing Shakespeare to our literature classes only to be met with audible groans, if not downright rebellion? I have found to my delight that students take on Elizabethan language with enthusiasm when introduced to the wildly colorful terms in this assignment (for which I have Susan Kelz Sperling and her book *Poplollies and Bellibones* [Penguin, 1979] to thank).

Groups of students brainstorm meanings for the words on the handout (see page 12; you may want to cut the handouts in half to separate the terms and their true definitions) and then compose sentences illustrating the proper way to use this strange new vocabulary. When confronted with actual meanings, the groups are rewarded with extra-credit points when correct, and all are entertained with this colorful language.

No matter how much time I schedule for brainstorming, students always ask for more. Many Elizabethan words are onomatopoeic, and some of the listed words' meanings are usually guessed correctly, such as *keak* and *snirtle,* which sound somewhat like cackles or snickers. While the groups are at work, I march around the room making cryptic remarks like "Too much snirtling in here; you are not supposed to enjoy yourselves!" and "Susan has murfles, and so do I!" I also like to tease about the meaning of *teen,* saying "Teens give me so much 'teen' that I am looking forward to 'chairday.'" Kids often decide that *bellibone* must mean the appendix or some internal organ (as in the sentence, "My bellibone hurts so I am going to the doctor,"), while they think a *bedswerver* might be someone who doesn't want to retire for the night yet. *Poplolly* usually inspires guesses of some sort of confection or lollypop.

Once the groups are satisfied that they have done their collective best at defining these words and using them in sentences, I give students a chance to volunteer definitions for each word as we go down the list together. If they are correct or very close to the actual definition, I give them a "brownie point" (extra credit). Once we have completed the list, I distribute the proper definitions. It's great fun to watch students read the definitions and then look back at their sentences. I let students take turns reading their sentences aloud. (Much snirtling can be heard throughout!) Sometimes, depending on the class, I ask for a short story, which students may lace with Elizabethan vocabulary, or for ten sentences using the Elizabethan terms.

All in all, Shakespeare's "sirrah" and "marry" seem tamer and more manageable after this experience.

Shirley Blaisdell, Bremerton High School, Bremerton, Washington

Prereading Shakespeare

Return with your teacher to the days of yore, when bellibones were nesh, athels were straight-fingered, and a bedswerver could count on riding the stang. (Believe it or not, William Shakespeare would have understood that!)

Assignment: Brainstorm the following vocabulary in terms of possible definitions. Exercise your imagination freely, but do create definitions that have some reasonable connections with the words. In addition to a definition, write an original sentence for each. After we try our hands at this, we'll learn the Elizabethan definitions.

1. aimcrier
2. bedswerver
3. bellibone
4. bellytimber
5. fellowfeel
6. flesh-spades
7. keak
8. lip-clap
9. lubberwort
10. merry-go-sorry
11. mubblefubbles (synonyms: blue devils, mulligrubs)
12. murfles
13. poplolly
14. snirtle
15. nithe
16. merry-go-down (synonym: kill priest)
17. teen
18. downsteepy
19. maw-wallop
20. chairday
21. nesh
22. athels
23. riding the stang

To be used after brainstorming:

Susan Kelz Sperling, author of *Poplollies and Bellibones: A Celebration of Lost Words* (Penguin, 1979), brings back to life over 400 obsolete, rare, and dialectical words too delicious to have disappeared from our language forever. Here are the definitions for the words in our exercise:

1. aimcrier: an applauder, one who encouraged the archer, the one who stood near the target to report the results of each round
2. bedswerver: a person unfaithful to the marriage vows
3. bellibone: a lovely maiden; an anglicization of the French *belle et bonne* (fair and good)
4. bellytimber: food, provisions
5. fellowfeel: to share another person's feelings, to empathize
6. flesh-spades: fingernails
7. keak: to cackle
8. lip-clap: a kiss
9. lubberwort: food or drink that makes one idle and stupid, junk food
10. merry-go-sorry: a story that makes you both happy and sad
11. mubblefubbles: depression, the blues
12. murfles: freckles
13. poplolly: a little darling, from the French *poupelet* (little doll)
14. snirtle: to snicker, to laugh quietly and mockingly
15. nithe: envy or hatred
16. merry-go-down: strong wine
17. teen: trouble, imitation
18. downsteepy: a steep path
19. maw-wallop: badly cooked food
20. chairday: retirement
21. nesh: delicate
22. athels: noblemen
23. riding the stang: a method of public shaming. In her book, Susan Sperling explains this event as "a procession in which an unfaithful husband was carried atop a ladder through village streets for women to censure, verbally or otherwise."

Define Your Terms

Students sometimes don't understand what information is called for in study questions or on tests. Many different terms are used when asking students to think and write about what they've learned, and some of them may be unfamiliar to students or may bear confusing similarities to one another. This assignment helps senior high school students understand the nuances among such terms and concepts.

Start by giving students this list of terms:

analyze
be specific
compare
condense
contrast
criticize
define
describe
discuss
enumerate
evaluate
explain
give examples
illustrate
interpret
justify
list
mention
name
outline
quote
refer to
sketch
stress
summarize

Pairs or small groups of students take two to four terms each. (There will probably need to be overlap, with different groups covering some of the same terms.) Group members first jot down what they think the terms mean and then look up the actual meanings in a dictionary or consult the list of definitions provided below. After comparing and contrasting the terms among themselves, they present their words to the class, highlighting the similarities and differences among them and, where possible, supplying examples of how each term might be used.

The following definitions are taken from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.*

analyze
to study or determine the nature and relationship of the parts of by analysis

be specific
specific: constituting or falling into a specifiable category

compare
to examine the character or qualities of, especially in order to discover resemblances or differences

condense
to make denser or more compact

contrast
to set off in contrast: compare or appraise in respect to differences

criticize
to consider the merits and demerits of and judge accordingly; evaluate

define
to discover and set forth the meaning of (as a word); to make distinct, clear, or detailed in outline

describe
to represent or give an account of in words

discuss
to present in detail for examination or consideration; to talk about

enumerate
to ascertain the number of; to specify one after another; list

evaluate
to determine or fix the value of; to determine the significance or worth of, usually by careful appraisal and study

explain
to make plain or understandable; to give the reason for or cause of; to show the logical development or relationships of

give examples
to present one that serves as a pattern to be imitated or not to be imitated; to present a single item, fact, incident, or aspect that is representative of all of a group or type; to present an instance (as a problem to be solved) serving to illustrate a rule or precept or to act as an exercise in the application of a rule

illustrate
to make clear by giving or serving as an example or instance; to show clearly; demonstrate; to give an example or instance

interpret
to explain or tell the meaning of; present in understandable terms

justify
to prove or show to be just, right, or reasonable

list
enumerate; to include on a list; register

mention
the act or instance of citing or calling attention to someone or something, especially in a casual or incidental manner

name
to mention or identify by name (a word or phrase that constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing)

outline
a condensed treatment of a particular subject; a summary of a written work; a preliminary account of a project

quote
to speak or write (a passage) from another, usually with credit acknowledgment; to repeat a passage from, especially in substantiation or illustration; to give exact information on

refer to
to think of, regard, or classify within a general cause; to allot to a particular place, stage, or period; to regard as coming from or located in a specific area; to direct attention, usually by clear and specific mention

sketch
a tentative draft (as for a literary work); a brief description (as of a person) or outline; a short literary composition somewhat resembling the short story and the essay but intentionally slight in treatment, discursive in style, and familiar in tone

stress
place emphasis or weight on

summarize
to tell in, or reduce to, a summary; to make a summary; summary: covering the main points succinctly

This assignment not only helps students understand distinctions among important terms and concepts but can also increase students' confidence when they are faced with study questions or exams.

Sylvia Slack, McGavock High School, Nashville, Tennessee

3 PREWRITING/WRITING

Creating an Individual and Class Definition of "Courage"

While my students are reading the early chapters of *The Red Badge of Courage,* I ask them to spend one day discussing and refining what they mean when they talk about "courage." Each student does a rank ordering of ten events, either historical or current, which have been considered courageous by some and foolish, pointless, or insane by others. See the handout on page 18.

Students talk about their differing points of view in small groups and then summarize their discussions for the entire class. Gleaning ideas from each group, I write a general definition of "courage" on the board to be used later as a standard for evaluating the behavior of Henry Fleming. I find that this supplementary activity adds clarity to later discussions of Henry's actions. It helps students to deal with the issue of whether or not Henry, through the experience of combat, has truly achieved manhood or heroism, or whether he is merely demonstrating a primal instinct for survival or violence.

I encourage students to bring in their own examples of events that fit this description. The best examples may either be discussed as a class or added to the list that students receive for rank ordering.

James Motzko, Hopkins High School, Minnetonka, Minnesota

Creating a Definition of "Courage"

Directions: Read each of the following examples of courage; then rank order them 1–10, 1 being the most impressive act of courage, 10 the least impressive. Be prepared to defend your choice. Having used this process as a warm-up, write your own definition of courage in the space provided.

1. A parent runs back into a burning house to save the baby.
2. A man deliberately drives a truck carrying explosives into a Marine barracks and blows it and himself up.
3. A Greek soldier runs 26 miles from the battlefield to Athens, then dies from exhaustion after reporting the news of victory.
4. A father with arthritis works 20 years in a steel mill to save money for his son's college education.
5. A Japanese man with a parachute on his back skis down Mt. Everest. He is the first to ever attempt it.
6. A mother whose daughter is killed by a drunk driver organizes M.A.D.D.; she petitions state and federal governments to get tough with new D.W.I. legislation.
7. In the midst of a fierce Vietnam battle, a soldier wipes out a machine gun nest single-handedly, then dives on a live grenade to save his buddies.
8. Although white students taunt her mercilessly, a 15-year-old girl is the first African American student to attend Little Rock Central High in the 1950s.
9. An off-duty policeman shoots and kills brutal thieves attempting to rob a 7-11 store.
10. A scientist gives up friends and family (his wife leaves him; his children don't know him) to discover a cure for a dread disease.

My definition of courage:

Writing the Other Side of the Story

One of my five-year-old son's favorite books is *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs! by A. Wolf* (as told to Jon Scieszka). This witty children's book presents the wolf's side of the story—he was framed by gossip-hungry reporters! I thought that taking a familiar story and giving it a twist was something my English composition students might have fun with. I used this with nontraditional students of all ages, but it would also work for middle school and high school.

My students gathered in a semicircle for "story time," and I read *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* aloud to them. Then I said, "You are 'the villain' of any familiar story. Tell us your side." The students divided into groups of three and, in less than an hour, had written the most amazing stories.

In one, Wily E. Coyote had been cheated out of a track scholarship by an ever-deceitful Roadrunner. In another, the Giant at the top of the beanstalk explained how he innocently invited Jack to dinner but the brat kept stealing his stuff. My favorite was Little Red Riding Hood, the infamous drug runner, and her Granny, the addict. In my students' version, the wolf was a narcotics detective valiantly trying to end Red's days of dealing drugs.

I like to vary writing activities, showing my classes that writing can be *fun.* This assignment accomplished that, keeping us laughing until our sides hurt.

Debora Ford Van Hoorn, Lincoln College at Normal, Normal, Illinois

Mind Reading as a Prewriting Tool

Becoming a mind reader only sounds mysterious and magical. I have found that the following prediction activity encourages the critical thinking skills of my students, improves their writing development, and promotes audience awareness.

Here are the instructions that I give to my students:

1. Think about four experiences in your life that you remember in detail, and list them on a sheet of paper.
2. Circle the one experience that is the most memorable.
3. On the front side of a sheet of paper, write content questions that you, the writer, will want to answer as you write about this experience.
4. On the bottom of the front side of the paper, write questions that you, the writer, think the reader will want answered in your story about the experience. (The questions should be different from your list of questions in Step 3.)
5. Turn your paper over, and in the upper left-hand corner of the paper, write the topic of the experience that you, the writer, have chosen.
6. Pair up with another student and exchange papers. Do not read the writer's questions from Step 3.
7. Write a list of content questions that you, the reader, will want answered about the topic chosen by the writer. Return the paper to the writer.
8. Compare the content questions listed by you, the writer, with those suggested by the reader. Were you a mind reader? Did you anticipate your reader's questions?
9. Share with the class the types of questions (both specific and general) that you did not anticipate that the reader would ask.
10. Write a first draft of your paper, using the questions generated by yourself and the reader.

This prewriting activity helps students generate content questions about their topics and anticipates questions that a reader might have. It promotes different levels of questioning and different levels of thinking. And the lists of questions help students as they revise their first drafts. Perhaps there's magic involved after all.

Jim Newkirk, Western Heights Middle School, Hagerstown, Maryland

A Prewriting Approach: Writing and Exploring Values

Many times our students are programmed to think they have nothing to write. "I don't know what to write. I don't have anything to say."

Next time students agonize over the pangs of writing, smile instead of frowning. Tell them that before leaving your class they will have a topic for writing. The following questionnaire leads into an excellent prewriting session. (Remember they have to do the discovery.)

Values Questionnaire

Choose only one answer.

1. Which is the worst problem in society today?
   a. drug dealers
   b. drunk driving
   c. air pollution
   d. other
2. Which do you value most?
   a. world peace
   b. solutions to incurable diseases
   c. your family
   d. other
3. If you were President of the United States, which issues would you put at the top of your list of concerns?
   a. nuclear power
   b. environment
   c. poverty
   d. other

After students have time to share their answers in triads, bring them together as a class and ask for volunteers to share what happened in the group. (Tally answers if you wish.) Undoubtedly, some students will demand to speak their minds about one of the topics in the questionnaire. When this happens, I tell those students that they now have a topic for writing. The discovery comes from the students, and they feel as if they have come up with their own topics.

Sometimes we bring it a step further with role-playing. The students discover that their conversations can become supporting details for their drafts. The choice of an extensive or reflexive piece is up to the student.

Through group sharing and role-playing, students have brought their outside world to the classroom, and the classroom has helped them explore their values in daily life.

Dawn Martin, E. A. Olle Middle School, Alief, Texas

Life Is a Metaphor

Some students find the notion of metaphorical language intimidating or discomforting—largely, I suspect, because they rarely identify (or have pointed out to them) metaphors outside the context of published professional writing.

As a way of demystifying the metaphor, I offer three common items for the consideration of the class, such as a stapler, a box of paper clips, and a pack of index cards. (I like to vary the items used so that they do not grow stale for me—and so I can identify more challenging and more fruitful items for future use.)

Next, I write "Life is a _____." on the board, and I ask the class to select one of the three items to complete the sentence. Usually, a couple of students will call out a choice and we will check for consensus, but occasionally they are more reserved, so we delay a final selection until we've gone a little further. (Sometimes we keep working with all three.)

The next step is to explain how the selected item can be a metaphor for life. We brainstorm these but do not record the responses on the board. Common responses for the stapler, for example, include notions like "You have to push it to get it to do what you want," "It makes things stick together," and "You have to put things into it if you expect to get anything out of it." Once a few suggestions are made, this generally flows well.

Before we lose momentum, I shift their attention back to the phrase on the board and, telling them to disregard the three objects previously considered, ask them to brainstorm a list of items to complete the metaphor. I anticipate some hackneyed responses, like "highway," but by insisting that we fill the board, I ensure that selections cover quite a range in terms of their depth. If we seem to run dry, sometimes offering the simile version, "Life is like a _____" gives a slight—but productive—shift of perspective. (Forrest Gump's mother was especially helpful in this respect.)

After the board has been filled, I ask the students to form small groups of three or four. The groups are then to select the metaphor (or simile) they like best and brainstorm (and record) as many statements as they can which demonstrate, clarify, or illustrate the metaphor. These are then shared with the rest of the class.

The most satisfying benefit of this exercise is seeing the complexity of thoughts that flow almost painlessly. A side benefit of no small consequence is that the exercise has stimulated some students to go on to produce pieces of creative writing—especially poetry.

W. David LeNoir, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky

Memory Chain

I can't recall where I came across this idea, but I have used it successfully as a writing prompt for all ages from eighth graders through experienced teachers in a writing project. The depth to which they extend their pieces varies, but the writing is invariably interesting.

I begin by asking students to close their eyes and relax. I then read aloud the series of prompts shown below, without the numbers or the introduction. I pause to the count of 30 or more after each prompt. Students remain quiet with their eyes closed, letting the ideas come to them but not yet taking any notes. The wait may seem interminable, but it is important. A writing project participant this past summer said she thought the wait time was too long as we did this "prewriting," but that once she started to write, she was delighted with how smoothly and easily the writing flowed. She decided the wait was vital.

At the end of this "prewriting," I ask students to open their eyes and I hand out the instructions and list shown below. On a separate piece of paper, students are asked to jot down words or phrases for each of the prompts. This list becomes the "treasury" from which they draw as they write.

Memory Chain: An Important Person in My Life

Use each of the suggestions below to jot notes to yourself. When you have completed numbers 1 through 15, use this treasury of information to write a good para graph (probably close to a page) about that person and his or her importance to you.

1. Think of a person who was important to you in the past. The person may be living or dead, a relative or a friend.
2. What is the person's name?
3. Describe a distinctive characteristic of this person.
4. Think of a time when you were with this person. Where were you? Describe the exact place.
5. In your mental picture, what do you see around this person (objects, etc.)?
6. What colors do you associate with the person and the place you are picturing?
7. What sounds (either near or far off) do you recall hearing?

8. Do you remember any smells or fragrances?
9. Were you two alone or were there others present? If other people were present, who were they?
10. What was going on or what were you doing?
11. What did this person typically say? Think of some of the exact words or phrases the person often used, and write them down, including quotation marks.
12. What did you say when with this person? Again, use quotation marks.
13. What do you remember feeling?
14. As you look back, what is your dominant impression of this person?
15. In retrospect, what does that person or time mean to you now?

Look over your notes, add material, and reorganize as necessary. Then write!

Once the "treasury" is complete, students begin a rough draft of the actual piece. For some, this takes the form of a narrative; for others, it is a poem or story. The diversity of genre is encouraged. Rough drafts are shared with a partner or writing group, revised, and polished to be turned in.

For my students, the resultant writing ultimately becomes part of an autobiography which we work on the entire year. Whatever the form the writing finally takes, the prewriting and note taking draw on writers' own rich resources of memory and meaning.

Lucia Leonardelli, Gull Lake Middle School, Kalamazoo, Michigan

4 WRITING: DEVELOPING A CHARACTER

Inventing a Character before Writing

When short story season rolls around, I live with a sense of dread. I know I'll have to read endless pages of scrawled, dead prose about Rambo-like robots shooting their way to heaven—it's discouraging, to say the least.

My remedy is to tell the class that we're going to invent a person. Then we go about inventing this character using the genius of everyone in the room, even the kid who can't spell Rambo. To start the process, I fire off a series of questions:

I ask: "How old is our character?"

Axel says: "17."

I ask: "Male or female?"

Lori says: "Female."

I ask: "Any distinguishing characteristics?"

April says: "She's in a wheelchair."

I ask: "Why?"

James says: "She fell up an escalator."

I ask: "How old was she when this happened?"

Ed says: "It happened last year."

I ask: "Where was she when she had her accident?"

Greg says: "Macy's."

I ask: "What was she doing there?"

Clint says: "She was heading for the jewelry department to steal a necklace for her mother."

I ask: "Was she alone?"

Misty says: 'No. Her boyfriend was with her."

I ask: "What is he like? . . ."

My nearly endless series of questions continues until we get not an answer, but a person, slowly evolving as everyone contributes to the individual's portrait. Whether our first assignment is to be individual character profiles or collaborative short stories, this process gets us all off to a good start.

Randy Larson, Westwood High School, Gillette, Wyoming

Showing versus Telling

I have always preached the importance of showing versus telling in writing, but with only varying degrees of success until I hit upon a surefire, one-period activity that students and I enjoy.

I developed the idea several years ago, after the Missoula Puppet Theatre troupe from Montana visited my Hot Springs, South Dakota, classrooms. In an effort to teach the skill of reading with emotion, the actors selected volunteers from the class to draw one card from a stack of 3" x 5" cards containing single words that conveyed a feeling, such as "love" or "anger." Volunteers also had to draw another card from a stack containing simple nursery rhymes and slogans from television commercials such as "Oh—What a feeling!" "Sometimes you gotta break the rules," "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression," and "Just do it." The task was to read the phrase or rhyme while using voice to exaggerate the selected feeling. The improvisation was deemed successful if other members of the class could guess the feeling that the reader was trying to convey.

I have modified this activity to teach *showing* versus *telling*. I usually begin this activity after we've read some short stories and before students try some creative writing themselves. First, I discuss with the class the concept and value of writing that shows an emotion or character trait instead of merely telling it. I often read a sample of *showing* writing from something we've just read.

We then brainstorm a simple paragraph on the board that "shows." After that, I give each student a slip of paper bearing the word for a character trait or emotion. Sample words might include *confused, angry, happy, frightened, rude, in love, generous, hysterical, cheap, chivalrous, flirtatious, macho, bored, hyper, grumpy, sleepy.* Students must develop a character, along with a simple scene that shows the character exhibiting the specified attribute or emotion. I suggest dialogue and interaction with a second character as helpful tools for showing.

Students are warned not to slip in any synonyms for the assigned word. They are asked to keep their words completely secret. After fifteen to twenty minutes, students should have developed scenes one or two paragraphs long.

One at a time, students read what they've written to see if other class members can guess the word they are trying to show. I ask students not to blurt out the answers but instead to wait to be called on by the readers, once they have finished reading. Readers seem to love this little bit of power, and it gives me the chance to sit back and enjoy the proceedings.

Paul Seline, Olympia High School, Stanford, Illinois

Creating a Character

This assignment, designed to help high school writing students develop an understanding of characterization techniques, works well whether students are reading short stories or writing them.

You will need an assortment of pictures of people, one for each student in the class. I use a selection of pictures of models and "real people," and have found some especially interesting faces in *National Geographic.*

Next, give each student a picture and the following characterization guide. Ask the students to "create" a character for the person in the picture, using the guidelines. They are to give the character a name and a personality, using the characterization techniques provided. Suggest that they pay particular attention to speech patterns, dialect, and behavior.

When all students have completed the activity, post the pictures around the room, and ask the students to read their characterizations. The rest of the class will enjoy trying to match up the characterizations with the pictures.

A follow-up assignment asks students to write a conversation between two of these "characters."

Characterization Guide Sheet

An author reveals a character by describing the character's appearance, thoughts, words, and behavior. We also learn about a character from what other characters say about him or her. Look at the picture of your person. Develop a character based on this picture.

My character's name is:

My character's thoughts are: (Include wishes, hopes, and dreams that your character might have).

Provide an example of your character's speech: (Consider vocabulary, dialect, pronunciation, etc.).

Describe your character's behavior and actions as he or she walks into a crowded room where a group of friends have gathered to celebrate your character's birthday.

What would his or her best friend say about your character?

Carol B. Brown, John Stark Regional High School, Weare, New Hampshire

Writing Dialogue for Fun and Practice

Two common difficulties I have found among my students are inventing good dialogue and using standard punctuation, particularly quotation marks. The following assignment, used after a review and practice session with quotation marks, is fun for students and produces high-quality writing.

I ask students to write a dialogue for any one set of the following characters in the situation described. The dialogue must make sense, but it does not have to be a complete story. It must be a series of direct quotes, correctly punctuated, with whatever other words or phrases are necessary for the conversation to be clearly understood. Anytime one of the characters is listed as "you," the students may substitute any character's name if they wish. The dialogue should cover at least one side of a page, but no more than two sides.

> The year is 2023, and it is the 30th reunion of your high school graduating class. You see for the first time in thirty years the person who sat next to you in ninth-grade English (or perhaps your favorite, but by now quite elderly, ninth-grade English teacher).
>
> You are at a bank and witness an attempted robbery. Unfortunately, the crook forgot to bring either his/her robbery note or a pen, and the bank clerk is hard of hearing.
>
> Your very best friend in the whole world comes down with a disease that destroys his/her sense of smell. You have known about this for a while, however, and there has never been any problem before. Unfortunately, his/her deodorant no longer works the way it should.
>
> You have just passed your driving test. Now it's time to ask your mom or dad for the car to go someplace on your own for the very first time.
>
> A truly famous person whom you have always admired is in town, and you see him/her on the street. You ask the person for an autograph and carry on a short conversation.
>
> You have two tickets to the concert of your dreams. Unfortunately, your two best friends know you have these tickets and each one expects to be the one you invite to go. The conversation you write should be between you and the friend who doesn't go with you, or among you and both of the friends.

You overhear a "funeral" service that two children conduct for Fluffy, their beloved, but dead, pet goldfish.

You just passed your driver's test and your parents let you take the car out by yourself when you asked. Unfortunately, while it was parked at the mall, the car was sideswiped, and the person who hit the car is long gone and there were no witnesses. You can drive it home, but your parents are waiting for you and you hadn't exactly told them you were going to the mall.

Your great-grandmother, who loves you dearly, has spent the last month making you a handmade birthday gift—a knitted hat that is probably the ugliest thing you've ever seen. What do you say as you see the gift for the first time and when she asks you how you like it? Be sure to include her words as well as your own.

Convince a skeptical teacher that your pet (or little brother) really did eat your homework.

Explain to your parent(s) why you flunked gym.

Kathryn Bowman Simoni, Rogers High School, Toledo, Ohio

What a Character!

When students choose friends, they rely on a sense of what personality traits they like and dislike. They can use that same analytical ability to evaluate characters in stories.

I ask students to write a letter to their parents telling them about a fellow student that they want to bring home for the weekend. This assignment works well with college students who live away from home, but it can also work with high school students, who can be asked to imagine that they are inviting friends to visit their families. The students know that their families may like some things about the guest and dislike other things. The purpose of the letter is to prepare the parents for the potential guest. The twist is that the guest is a fictional character chosen by the student.

In composing their letters, the students will have to analyze the quirks of both the character and their parents. Will the family be fooled by the first impression? Will the character get along with the family? What discussion topics should be avoided? How should the family act around the guest? Students can also consider the conflict that the character encountered in the story. Can the family perhaps help with the conflict? Or should mention of the conflict be avoided?

Before students begin writing, I emphasize the importance of some basic criteria for analyzing and describing characters:

1. Physical appearance and background (clothes, posture, makeup, hairstyle; cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious origins)
2. What they say, how they say it, and what others say about them (thoughts, hopes, beliefs, fears, feelings, motivations)
3. How they act and react toward self or others (actions may "speak louder than words")

As students have fun with this assignment, they gain insights into the characters, their own families, and themselves. They may also begin to consider relationships between people in new ways as they think about personality makeup and how particular traits influence how people act.

Marilen Wegner, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois

Classified Ads and Character Sketches

Are your students bored, out of sorts, depressed? For something a little different, try this writing assignment based on classified ads. Ads for either garage sales or miscellaneous items work well. First, you will need to peruse the ads in your local newspaper and cut out any that sound interesting. Choose enough ads so that you have three or four more than the number of your students. Tape each ad to a note card and bring the cards to class.

Give each student a card and allow students to trade or exchange cards if they find their cards uninteresting. Explain that students will be writing character sketches and that they have a choice. They can write a description of (1) the person who is selling a particular item (or items), or (2) of the person who would buy a particular item (or items). Students may choose whether to write the character sketch in first or third person. Encourage them to be imaginative and speculate about the possibilities: has the person who is selling a "carpet shampooer—used only once" removed all the carpets from the house to cut down on housework? Has the person who is selling a "ruby red vase" suddenly become allergic to flowers? Is the person having a "moving" sale getting out of town one step ahead of the police? The only limit is the imagination of your students.

If you think your students would benefit from a little more direction, you may want to write a few sample responses beforehand to use as examples. By starting with a character's possessions and making inferences and deductions, my students have come up with very original details and interesting characters. The benefits of this activity carry over into reading and writing fiction, as students see the value of a few details in creating a rich and more complete picture of a person.

Cheri Louise Ross, Penn State Harrisburg—Capital College, Middletown, Pennsylvania

5 POETRY

Waterfall of Words

The "Waterfall of Words" is a good way to sensitize students to the sound of well written prose or poetry, or to loosen students up for oral performances. The source for this idea was a workshop presented by Jenny Krugman of Florida.

Begin by reading aloud the poem or short selection of prose you wish to use. Have students mark a word, phrase, or passage that appeals to them or that speaks strongly to them.

Then tell students that you will begin moving from desk to desk, and as you approach each student, you want that student to begin reading aloud what they have marked and to continue reading until you indicate to stop. (A bell or large wave of the arms works well as an end signal.)

Ask students to read at a comfortable volume and speed, but not to try to drown out other students. Since students will be speaking for two or three minutes, they should take time to focus on the sounds, rhythm, and flow of what they are reading. Reassure students that repetition is fine, since some of them are likely to mark the same items.

As you move around the room, motioning to each student in turn to begin, you and your students will find yourselves awash in a waterfall of words. After a minute or two, use the end signal, and listen to the waterfall of words trickle off.

I find that this activity is a good warm-up to reading poetry. It helps students feel less intimidated by reading aloud, and encourages them to use their voices more effectively and actively listen to what they're reading. Even the shyest student will speak out loudly and confidently when reading such a short passage.

This exercise also helps the class focus on the "heart" of a story, poem, or essay under discussion, since invariably several students will choose key passages from work to read aloud, and the importance of a particular word or passage tends to be emphasized by the repetition heard during the activity.

Beverly J. Jackson, Teacher-in-Residence, Writing Improvement Network, Columbia, South Carolina

Writing Bio-Poems

The idea of the bio-poem is nothing new, but I have found this version of the bio-poem assignment especially effective. The inspiration for this assignment came from the Summer 1993 Harris County (Texas) Writing Project. It makes a great activity for the beginning of the year because it facilitates getting acquainted, introducing (or reviewing) the writing process, writing with your students, providing material for later writing, developing cooperation among students, and preparing something spiffy for the parents to see at open house. Also, I present the assignment in such a way that it allows for mini-lessons on writing process, sentence structure, vivid verbs, and poetic forms. See page 37 for the handout page of student guidelines.

I have the students share their lists and lines throughout the process for feedback and to help their classmates. They have numerous opportunities to share with one another and become interested in each other's lives. Students often realize that they have similar experiences in common, prompting a lot of interesting discussion. Students are really amazed when material on the teacher's list is similar to theirs!

When students are ready to make final copies, I ask them to write or type on one side of a white sheet of paper. Then they can mount their poems on a sheet of construction paper and decorate them with drawings and/or scraps of fabric or paper.

Finally, I put each class's "quilt blocks" together into a "quilt" for display by punching holes in the corners and connecting them with yarn. Class togetherness and community are enhanced when they see that the fabrics of their lives have common threads; the quilt we display on the wall is an expression of that sense of community.

Dana Haring, Linderman School, Kalispell, Montana

Writing Bio-Poems

Student Guidelines

The first step to writing a bio-poem is having lots of information. Jot down 40–50 specific things you can remember from your life, from the trivial to the important, from eating at McDonald's to saving your brother's life. When you've completed that list, you're ready to go on.

Now that you've listed lots of things you've accomplished and experienced, it's time to turn them into art! Basically, you will choose your 15–25 best, most unique items and create "snapshots." That means you will write with so much description and sensory language that your reader will actually be able to visualize your events. Here's how:

- Read down your list slowly, picturing each event and thinking about how you might describe it.
- Highlight or circle the ones that you think would make the most vivid and interesting lines for a poem.
- After going through your list, look over what you've chosen. Make sure you have enough items listed.
- On another sheet of paper, start working with words to describe each event in a complete sentence. You can start with any one you want; remember, this is only a first draft and you can make changes later. Be as specific as possible, and try to paint pictures with your words. For example, you might have something on your list like, "got a puppy." To paint a more vivid picture, you could change that to "A spotted mutt has licked my face," or "I rescued a puppy from the pound."
- Once you have your sentences written, start deciding what order you would like them to follow in your poem. Also divide your sentences into lines for your poem. Often, a poem line will end with a vivid verb or noun. That makes the reader interested in continuing. If you have trouble deciding where to divide your lines, look at some examples of poems to see how the poets divided the lines, or ask a classmate to help you decide where to divide a few, until you get the feel for it.
- Write your poem on a new sheet of paper with the lines in the order you decided and the lines divided so it "looks like a poem." Show it to somebody and get their comments. Make any additional changes to improve your work. When you have it exactly the way you like it, proofread it for spelling and other errors. Now you're ready to make your final copy.

Jot-List Poetry

Writing jot-list poetry is fairly easy for students, but when I begin, I usually don't tell them that they're going to write a poem because some students freeze up and say they can't write a poem.

The topics may be on any subject. I've been successful with this activity following a poem called "Childhood Is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies" by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Students like to think about being kids and have fun recalling details. If you choose childhood as a topic, it isn't necessary to read the Millay poem. These are the steps I use:

1. Conduct a brainstorming session in which students recall details from their childhood, for example, Hot Wheels, Barbie dolls, monsters under the bed, playing soldier, etc. Write all the items on the board under the heading "Childhood is the kingdom where. . . ." However, you may choose another similar prompt: "Summer is the time when . . .," "Elementary school is the place where . . .," etc. Experiment. The board should be fairly well-covered by the end of the brain storming session.
2. At the top of your paper, write "Childhood is the kingdom where. . . ." Think hard about your topic. What concrete details come to mind? What sensory details—sight, sound, touch, taste, smell—come to mind? What can you see inside your head?
3. Jot down the details as they come to you. Don't stop to evaluate anything at this point. Just write as fast as you can. The longer your jot list, the better.
4. Now read your jot list to yourself. What are the strongest items on your list? Mark them. What are the weakest parts? Can you revise them or should you mark them out?
5. Look again at the items on your jot list. Arrange the items in some kind of logical order. Are there details you need to add? Are there overlapping items? Mark out items that aren't needed. Rewrite your list.
6. Now you will begin to make a poem from your jot list. Begin with "Childhood is the kingdom where. . . ." Repeating that element in the poem could help to unify your piece. Remember, poetry does not have to rhyme. Reread your jot list carefully. Look for deadweight. Mark out nonessential words. Look for free-

loaders like prepositions, conjunctions, or other words not necessary to convey meaning. Read your list aloud to yourself. Can you omit anything without hindering meaning? Do you need to add anything to make parts stronger?

7. Read your list aloud to yourself. Think about cutting out words. Experiment with the order of your ideas. Have you used complete sentences when you don't need them? Where do you need more work?
8. Read your list aloud to yourself. Experiment with line division. Experiment with punctuation. Experiment with stanza form. (Dividing lines to make the poem is more difficult for some students. At this point, I conduct walking conferences to offer suggestions to students who are having problems. There are usually some students who are quite adept at this activity and finish steps while others are still working. Let those students help you work with other students. Some students can provide helpful advice with line divisions and punctuation.)
9. Make another draft of your poem. Read it aloud to yourself. You might share it with a consultant and talk about your poem. Look at it carefully to see if every word carries its weight.
10. When you feel good about your poem, make a final draft.

When I use this activity, I write along with my students and create my own poem. I share with them each step in the process and talk about what I've done, where I've had trouble, what I like, and what I don't like. Students can make some good suggestions. Before I used this activity the first time, I did it on my own to get a feel for it. It's okay to have parts of yours done ahead of time.

I think it's important that the teacher work along with the students. Better yet, asking students for help makes them feel good, and they are more willing to do the activity. If you can get these poems typed, they make a good class publication.

Ed Youngblood, University of Georgia, Athens

Approachable Poetry

I use this exercise to prompt reluctant students to experiment with writing simple poems.

The kernel of this idea comes from a poem and a discussion question from *Adventures in Reading* (Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963, p. 359).

The discussion question which prompted this idea asks students to think up their own definitions of a kitten at play, in two lines of not more than ten words altogether.

I ask students to use the same format and concise language to create their own riddles about animals. I suggest that they begin by selecting several animals and listing characteristics and things they know about these animals. Then they select the most interesting and humorous details on which to base their riddles, and begin writing. I ask students to try to follow the guideline of six syllables per line, but they may use a five- or seven-syllable line length instead if they find it more natural for a particular poem.

Students are free to choose partners for brainstorming and trying out ideas. (But partners must agree not to reveal the subjects of one another's riddles to anyone else.)

After students are finished writing, they take turns reading the results out loud, and the class identifies the animal described in each riddle.

This activity works well with students who are self-conscious about their writing abilities. The limited focus allows everyone to do well, and even students who don't normally like to read aloud feel comfortable reading their riddles to the class.

Here are three examples of my students' work:

(Centipede)
It has a hundred legs,
so small they look like pegs.

(Owl)
It goes "who" in the night
and gives most girls a fright.

(Dinosaur)
In the past ere man began,
these big creatures roamed the land.

This exercise also proves an entertaining introduction to quatrain and longer poetry writing experiences.

Dennis McGuire, Marysville High School, Marysville, Kansas

This book was typeset in Arial Rounded MT Bold and Times New Roman by Tom Jaczak.

Typefaces used on the cover were Arial Rounded MT Bold and Times New Roman.

The book was printed on 50-lb. Lynx Opaque by United Graphics, Inc.

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National Council of Teachers of English
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www.ncte.org

ISBN 0-8141-3217-0
90000
9 780814 132173

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