

WRITVOICE

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D the contributors



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Lisa Erickson | *Why Multigenre Research* | pg 9 | Lisa Erickson teaches eighth grade English at French Camp School, in Manteca Unified and attended the Summer Institute this year. In her spare time she enjoys attending her son's soccer and baseball games, camping with her family, watching Giant's baseball and reading. She enjoys writing memoir and free verse poetry.



Shirley Hansen | *Improving the Quality to Students' Writing Using Art* | pg 7 | Shirley Hansen has taught at McKinley Elementary School in the Stockton Unified School District for the past 19 years. She is currently teaching third grade and has done so for several years; however, past experiences at McKinley include, first grade, fourth grade, and coaching ELA at the same site. This past summer was her first experience with the GVWP and she thoroughly enjoyed her time with the Summer Institute. She is looking forward to many more experiences with the Great Valley Writing Project. She is the mother of three adult children and loves spending time with them doing everything from house projects, playing games, relaxing, vacationing or just crafting together.



Jan Mohler | *Arrrgh...A Teacher's Guide to being a Pirate* | pg 4 | Jan Mohler teaches a first and second grade combination class at Stella Brockman Elementary in Manteca. She enjoyed participating in the 2014 Summer Institute. In her free time she likes to read, go to the beach, and spend time with friends and family.



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Maria Shreve | *Common Core and Fostering Creativity: Make Room for Narratives* | pg 2 |; *Dubious About Downsizing: The GVWP Writing Club at Fox Road Elementary* | pg 16 | Maria Shreve teaches English 9, Journalism, and AVID at Hughson High School in Hughson, California. In addition to teaching writing and writing about teaching writing, she enjoys memoir writing. Maria has had several articles published in California English, the professional journal of the California Association of Teachers of English, and is also the digital editor of Write Voice. Maria attended the GVWP Summer Institute in 2009.



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Common Core and Fostering Creativity: Make Room for Narratives

By Maria Shreve

As I left a day of Common Core training last school year, I could not get this thought out of my mind - *Narrative* has become a four-letter word. Yes, I realize I am stretching it a bit both literally and figuratively, but when the presenter said that there was no room for writing narratives in an English class, and that narrative writing belongs in a creative writing class, my heart sank. At my small rural high school, I am known as the "Narrative Queen," and I've always thought of narrative writing as a way to hook students into the world of writing and build that ever-so-important community of writers. And as for literature, the presenter encouraged us to skip over many of the narrative selections in a manner which reminded me of Ronald Reagan's view of redwood trees: "A tree is a tree. How many more do you have to look at?"

Of course, the Common Core does not say that there is to be no narrative writing, simply less. With that thought in mind, last year I actually skipped one of my favorite narrative writing assignments – a short story. However, as with anything else that is new, there are parts of Common Core that I am elated with, such as less of an emphasis on grammar, less of an emphasis on multiple choice, and more of an emphasis on writing in general. Still, there are constraints, and the question is how we foster creativity within the constraints of Common Core.

This past year was a year in which my colleagues and I experimented with Common Core in preparation of fully instituting Common Core this year. I tried to be creative in the approach to the Common Core lessons. The following are descriptions of the lessons and include elements of music, art, writing, speaking and/or collaborating. These are lessons that stood out to me because they fostered the creativity that is so important to truly engage students.

Before my ninth graders read "The Gift of the Magi," we explored the concept of situational irony through Alanis Morissette's song "Ironic," which, ironically, contained both examples and nonexamples of irony. Students listened to the song, paired up, and then listened to it again with the lyrics in front of them. Armed with highlighters and their critical thinking skills, students determined which lyrics actually were examples of irony. From pairs, they progressed to discussion in groups and then to a whole-class discussion. Students determined that the majority of the "ironies," such as "it's like rain on your wedding day" or "a black fly in your Chardonnay" were more of bad luck or a coincidence. After the lesson, I asked students to each write a one-page reflection on the experience of learning a literary concept through the use of music and lyrics, and my students unanimously expressed pleasure at going beyond the textbook.

After we read *Animal Farm*, I put students in groups of three or four, and they were told that much like what the animals did to Mr. Jones, they were going to "overthrow" me (Tyrant Shreve) – the only caveat being that they still had to be a productive class. After all, the animals actually produced more after they ousted Mr. Jones. The groups' task was to create a "Rebellion Platform," which consisted of designing a flag, writing a rousing song, writing seven commandments, and writing a mission statement. In order to do this, they had to go back to the text, review the animals' song ("Beasts of England, Beasts of Ireland..."), review the animals' seven commandments ("Two-legged animals are our enemy..."), and think about what is important to them in an English class. Each member of the group then presented a section of their "Rebellion Platform" to the class – and groups even received extra credit for singing the song.

For *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, I added an anticipation guide/gallery walk to my bag of tricks. I placed T-Charts on the walls of my classroom with eight statements from the anticipation guide, such as "Suicide is an honorable way to die" or "Parents should be able to choose who their children marry." In groups of three, students went from station to station and discussed with their peers their opinions on each issue. Before they left the station, they put a sticker on either the "agree" or "disagree" side. When they returned to their seats, they looked at the actual anticipation guide with 12 statements (I omitted four on the gallery walk so that there would

be more room between stations), and I told them to choose one that they felt the most strongly about to write an argumentative piece on. My students already had a strong background in persuasive/argumentative writing, and after students finished, at least half of the class volunteered to read and share their writing.

Of significance it that because I start the year off with narrative writing, including both a fictional narrative (a story completion) and a personal narrative, and have my students do a great deal of reflective writing throughout the school year, most of my students have no qualms about sharing their writing. It doesn't take long from the time I start off the year with a smile saying, "Beware, we share," to get them to the point that they are willing participants of a writing community.

Ideas for Common Core lessons can pop up anywhere. I was perusing Facebook before school one morning and watched a video of Ashton Kutcher's Teen Choice Award acceptance speech, in which he stated, in part: "The sexiest thing in the entire world is being really smart." The speech in its entirety was an amazing, inspirational speech for anyone, but especially teens. I played it on the projector for my students, and the speech served as a perfect catalyst for just about any type of writing - expository, argumentative, reflective, or narrative writing. (Do you agree with what Ashton Kutcher was saying? Explain what Ashton Kutcher was saying. Have you ever felt you can't be pretty and smart? Have you experienced being stereotyped based on your appearance?). Once again, because this was in issue that students could connect to, they wrote prolifically and were eager to share their writing, regardless of how they connected to it.

We read *The Odyssey* near the end of ninth grade, and, the epic, which is told from Odysseus' point of view, includes a segment in which Odysseus was held captive by Calypso. In the textbook there were lyrics from a song called "Calypso" by Suzanne Vega, which is written from Calypso's point of view. I recalled that in the past, simply reading the lyrics wasn't terribly effective, and I had a vague memory of the song on a CD I used to have. I bought a copy of the CD, played it for my students, and the song with its dreamy, poetic quality of a true literature major, brought the character Calypso to life, which, in turn brought their writing to life. (Was Odysseus a prisoner or a guest? Did Calypso have a right to keep Odysseus with her?)

By the end of the school year, I see a tremendous amount of growth in my ninth graders. My classroom is situated on the way to upper-class classrooms, and my former ninth graders frequently stop in to say hello. I'm not sure what this new group of 10th graders will say that they enjoyed the most in my class when I see them, but I know what the previous groups have all said – the gallery walk with the art on the walls and writing the short stories that were based on that art. This was the narrative that I begrudgingly skipped, due to constant reminders of the de-emphasis on narrative writing, even though I knew that the short story worked in so many ways.

The idea of using narrative writing as a means to instill a love and appreciation of other forms of writing is not a new idea. Barbara J. Radcliffe refers to the research of James Moffett in her article "Narrative as a Springboard for Expository and Persuasive Writing: James Moffett Revisited," and states: "Moffett's (1965), *I, You, and It* theory suggests a spiral of writing experiences, one that supports the development of the writer; that is, when creating writing assignments, teachers consider a purposeful progression of informal to formal, personal to impersonal, and lower to higher abstraction, through the interweaving and interrelation of discourses..." (19). In terms of Common Core, Radcliffe states "...rather than replacing narrative with exposition and argumentation, it is important to consider the classroom processes that allow both oral storytelling and the narrative form of writing to grow with a deeper understanding and complexity and coexist as a support for learning new modes of writing" (23-24).

This year will be an interesting one. We are supposed to be whole-heartedly implementing Common Core, and I will be going to more Common Core training, specifically, the ERWC (Expository, Reading and Writing Course). My ninth grade colleague and I did extensive work on the ERWC modules last year, without the benefit of training, and as a journalism major, I see the value of being able to master both the expository reading and writing that is embedded in Common Core. However, as Barbara J. Radcliff's research so clearly confirms: Let's not forget to make room for the narrative.

Arrrgh...A Teacher's Guide to Being a Pirate

By Jan Mohler

On a warm summer day a few years ago, a colleague showed me her pirate themed classroom and encouraged me to use any ideas I wanted to in my second grade classroom. With a little personal tweaking to fit my needs, I incorporated a pirate theme, and ahoy, it was a huge success! I found that it can work really well with primary grades and gives the students an experience they will remember for years to come.

The idea was to build my physical classroom, signals, literature, and reading incentive program, all around the theme of pirates. It felt as though I had stumbled upon a buried treasure.

Inside the Ship: My Classroom

My generic classroom was transformed and redecorated using a pirate theme. If I could add a pirate flare to the mundane items in my room, I did. Students entered the door with a sign that said, "Pirates Welcome." There was a mascot Captain Black Bear and his colorful parrot named Chico. A bulletin board with an ocean scene was a focus where students could sail to different islands by earning Reading Counts points. Our Star Student bulletin board was changed to Pirate Posters where each week a student would be a pirate of the week and share things about themselves. It was fun for me to work with a theme in my room and to create an exciting atmosphere for the students as they came to school on the first day of the school year. They were really excited to be part of a pirate classroom.

Reading and Writing: With Pirates

Second graders are captivated by picture books, and fortunately, there are a lot of pirate themed books for the first days of school. Each day after lunch we read books such as, *How I became a Pirate*, and *Pirates Don't Change Diapers*. We discussed why the author or illustrator chose certain words or pictures for the books, and I found that students would often select library books about pirates as well.

Every pirate needs a ship, and our classroom ship was designed on a large bulletin board. Named after my dog Gracie, the ship was called "Our Lady of Grace." On the side of the ship there was a picture of my dog wearing a pirate hat and a huge smile.

The ship was our reading incentive program where students could be rewarded for reading books. It symbolized our class sailing through the second grade.

For journal writing, students wrote using a word of the day as a topic. For the words, I picked a card from a pirate hat where each child had written suggestions. I feel that it's important for students to have input into topic choices, and they enjoyed watching as their idea was drawn from the hat before journal writing time.

Student Helpers: All Hands on Deck

In the past, I often struggled with how to assign classroom helpers to pass out materials. However, I discovered a simple way to organize helpers by making a large ship's wheel on the wall that was turned every Monday to designate which student would be responsible for which chores. There were eight spokes on the wheel, with jobs for eight people each week. It made it easy to pick helpers and incorporate the theme. The student's loved to look ahead and see what their special job would be. Some students would excitedly come to school on Mondays, and before the bell rang, remind me that it was time to turn the wheel for classroom jobs.

I have several signals I use in my classroom, and some have a pirate twist to them. For example, I will say to the class, "All hands on deck." When the students hear that, they put their hands on their head and respond in unison, "Aye, Aye Captain." If I say, "What's a good pirate say," they will respond, "Arrrgh!" It's fun to give students a chance to talk like a pirate and get their attention at the same time.



From the Captain

Having sung the praises of the pirate theme for a classroom, I know that there are a lot of other fun themes for a teacher to choose from as well. It's nice to have some theme to provide a classroom identity for the students. I share these ideas in case there is another teacher who may be interested in using the pirate theme. This is an idea that worked for me, and I'm so grateful for the summer day when I set sail into the world of pirates.

Collaboration, New Knowledge and Resilience

By Debra Schneider

During a recent hectic and stressful few weeks that started to hollow me out, two great collaborative experiences with teachers "filled me up."

COLLABORATION: PRESENTING T-BAR WORK TO OTHER HISTORY TEACHERS

I was invited to present about "history and literacy" to a group of history teachers in Lincoln Unified School District in Stockton. They had been working on increasing their knowledge of literacy instruction, with the help of teacher-consultants of the Great Valley Writing Project who were English teachers. The history teachers admitted that they had learned a lot and even tried some things they learned, but only "once, maybe twice...*big sigh*..." Since I argue for more disciplinary literacy practices, they responded immediately to my background as a history teacher who used a lot of reading and writing to teach history.

My presentation was about the journey we have made as a team of five action researchers at West High School in Tracy Unified School District, funded by a Teacher-Based Reform (T-BAR) grant. I explained to the LUSD teachers how we focused on what it means to "do history," how the Common Core for English and Literacy respects our disciplinary literacy, how we learned and implemented many more strategies to get students to read and write like historians, and what that looked like in our students' work. I did this by taking them through a series of four lessons in a unit about women during the 20th century that incorporates multiple strategies and ideas from our study. I also showed them a lot of examples of work from my four focal students, who are a combination of good and not-so-good writers, three of whom are ELLs.

The audience's biggest surprise? That using disciplinary literacy practices doesn't mean writing essays every day or even every week. When they hear "writing" they think of fully thought out and researched essays. Instead, I showed them how our students have something to write almost every day: arguments, "they say" statements, "quote sandwiches," how they are always practicing ways to express what they are finding in their readings, and how they are interpreting history. Full essays, however, are only a few times each quarter. Another lesson: Remember all of those strategies that the teachers had tried once or twice? I tried them more than forty times before things started to jell for my students. And in my presentation, they saw the students' work, so they saw the outcomes.

But more than the formal presentation of my research and my students' work, the most important part of the day was that we often stopped and discussed the "backstage" work of teaching, something I feel more and more strongly about. Don't get me wrong: It was helpful for them to see what I do with students (show, not tell) but not enough. They had to know *why* I chose that strategy and not another, what my rationale was for *those* documents instead of others, and how I read and planned with document Y but learned first period that I had to change my thinking once I saw how students responded to the document. None of that work is explicitly conveyed in a demo lesson presentation nor visible to an onlooker. That backstage work is what's going on in an experienced teacher's mind as she makes decisions that drive her instructional practices and students' learning opportunities based on her intentions for her students' learning. In fact, the best part of our day with the LUSD teachers was sharing our intentions and practices and discussing that backstage work.

COLLABORATION: WORKING WITH COLLEAGUES TO CRITIQUE OUR STATE'S ELA/ELD FRAMEWORK

You know how it feels when you get (the luxury of) extended time with really smart colleagues to explore new ideas while we all bring our collective and individual expertise to bear on the issue at hand? How it feels when people with knowledge and confidence trust each other enough to say, "I don't know," and "I have a different idea," and "I don't see it like that," and "I need to know more," and "What do you think?" and "Help me understand"? How it feels to spend five hours intensively, thoughtfully, and collaboratively working on a problem with people you respect and can learn from? Well, this is about one of those times.

I was invited to my county's Office of Education with other [ELA](#)- and [ELD](#)-focused educators (teachers and administrators) to read, discuss, and prepare a response to our state's new ELA/ELD framework.

California's draft [ELA/ELD Framework was released in December](#) for a 60-day public review and feedback. In this meeting in February, we read chapters and discussed our findings, so that we could let the state know what we think is needed to improve the framework as a resource for ELA/ELD teachers.

Our first reaction was that it was wonderful for the state to integrate ELA/ELD, to put them together with no question, to assume that they must be integrated in every classroom where ELLs are found (in California, that would be *most* classrooms). But after that, we had more suggestions for improvement than we had kudos.

Here's the most important point I discovered with my colleagues: The framework includes "snapshots" and "vignettes" showing the application of effective instructional strategies in literacy in classrooms, but those stories rarely show the backstage of teaching. Where is the teacher's **intentionality of practice?** (That's my new favorite phrase--hat tip to Alice Welch--to describe the most important element of all, the backstage prep work of teaching).

This stood out because, in a few stories, that intentionality of practice was quite clear. In one, for example, in a very short parenthetical statement, the author noted that the teacher had chosen to use [Goldilocks and the Three Bears](#) for teaching a lesson on retelling a story because the objects in the story (bowl, chair, bed) provided a kind of mnemonic device that students could use in their re-telling activity to prompt their memory and the story's special language. That's actually extremely important information, knowing the teacher's intention. Because without that, I could re-create that lesson, use the same book, do a good job, and give my students effective literacy instruction for one good lesson. But WITH that information about the teacher's intention, I would have more knowledge and understanding of why certain stories or books support students' instruction more than other stories and books. Then I could begin to look for similar books and stories and repeat that effective instruction many times that year.

NEW KNOWLEDGE AND RESILIENCE: GETTING FILLED UP

I see that much of my most satisfying and effective professional development work has been in collaboration with teachers where we talk about exactly that idea of purpose and intention. In Great Valley Writing Project workshops and meetings, in my T-BAR group, in professional learning communities with my peers, we take extended time to collaborate and think about our purposes and intentions. In our meetings and work together, we share and discuss our reasons for teaching what and how we do, so that we can become aware of the kinds of decisions others are making and why, and then apply those, as they work for our own students. That collaborative work gave me the patience, focus, ideas and strength to keep working in the tough world of teaching. If we were merely observing each other, what most fills me up wouldn't be visible. But in collaboration, in a community of practice, our intentionality of practice is the essence of what we share.

Improving the Quality to Students' Writing Using Art

By Shirley Hansen, M.A. Education

"We don't expect children to play the piano, study dance, or learn a sport without showing them the basic components of these subjects. Why do we expect them to understand the complexities of drawing on their own? Everyone loves to draw if they are given a nonthreatening environment with enough structure for success and enough freedom for creativity" (10).

This passage taken from the book *Drawing with Children*, by Mona Brookes, describes the Monart Method of teaching children how to draw and explores the concept that drawing is a learned skill. This method is based on using a series of lessons that teach children the concept that drawings are made up of lines, dots, angles, and circles. Students of the Monart method begin to look at their world through analyzing the small details, such as how a shape is made with a line, a circle, or a dot. It is interesting that when teaching your students to identify the small details in their art work, they are better able to then identify the small details in their own writing which in turn brings a story to life.

In the book *In Pictures and Words*, Kate Wood Ray states, "Composers of words share many of the same understandings about meaning making with composers of pictures, so choosing to teach into illustrations doesn't necessarily mean that time for teaching writing is sacrificed" (15). This is reflected in that in the past 18 years in my classroom I have consistently put into practice mini-art lessons to go with a variety of a writing projects. These mini-art lessons serve two purposes with my students. First, I have found that students are very focused when learning how to draw a new object. And, second, by learning how to put details into their artwork they then transfer that knowledge and put details into their writing.

What I do is have my students sit down with a pencil, eraser and an empty sheet of paper. At the overhead/ or document camera, I model / show them how to draw the pictures using dots, lines, curves, circles or whatever it might be that they need to put on their paper. I follow the beginning lessons outlined in the *Drawing with Children* book. I always identify what I am asking them to do, by saying, "Please place a dot in the lower two-thirds of the paper," or "Next to your dot, draw a line that goes out to the left of your paper..." I continue this process by telling the students where to place their dots, where to place the lines and so on until I finish drawing the picture. The students draw right along with me. It is exciting to hear students discover what they are drawing as the picture emerges. After the drawing, we then engage in conversations about the pictures we have drawn. We discuss the small details found in the pictures and how these details, the small lines, angles, or dots combined together add to the picture or tell a story all on their own. Then students are asked to relate their drawing to something or some experience they have had with whatever we have drawn. The conversations we have about the details in these pictures are usually very rich, and the students tend to embed in their conversations precise details about how they relate to the picture. They share that their picture is either something they have seen or done in their own personal lives. I rarely tell the students what we are going to be drawing that day as I don't want them giving up before they even begin. If I were to tell the students that we are going to draw a dragonfly in a natural setting, the students would immediately become overwhelmed and insist that it would be impossible for them to accomplish. Some of them wouldn't even pick up a pencil to try. I know I have made that mistake in the past.

The pictures I choose to draw are things I believe that my students have had an opportunity to see. A dragonfly over a rock with clumps of grass beside it and perhaps a pair of shoes with legs that travel to the top of the page. I have the legs drawn off the page so the sex of the individual is not revealed. I do this hoping that the children will claim ownership of the legs and that they think of those legs as their own. I might have them draw a row of feet and legs standing in a line or a glass of milk with some cookies beside it. A dandelion in a field of grass, a ladybug crawling on a leaf or a car parked next to a driveway. I take great care in what I select to draw because I want my students to then write about the drawing. My class is comprised of a very diverse group of

students and I cannot be sure that every child has had similar experiences. For example, *some of my students have never left the ten-block radius around the school, except maybe to go to the doctor's on the city bus.* In my classroom approximately two-thirds of my students are predominantly ELD students and at least one-third of my class is usually working one or two grade levels below the Common Core grade level expectations. I focus on what type of writing I am asking my students to create and then what types of subjects my students have plenty of background information about. So if we are working on narrative lessons, I will select scenes to draw that I think all students have had similar experiences with, and if we are working on an informational piece, I select scenes that relate to the subject matter taught. A really good resource I have found and use in my classroom is a series of books called "*Draw * Write * Now*" by Marie Hablitzel and Kim Sitzer. Although their book also focuses on handwriting, I take their lessons on how to draw the Statue of Liberty or Indian villages and use them with my students. After drawing the picture the students then write.

Another issue I always face in the beginning of each school year is that entering third grade students rarely have a long attention span, and they want to be done with assignments the moment they begin. By beginning the year with drawing lessons that then transform into writing lessons, it helps my students become very engaged in their work. As they are working they are also developing their ability to focus for longer periods of time. When researching, I was excited to see that others had similar experiences with this technique. As Katie Wood Ray states, "Children's illustrating can play in helping them learn to sit in chairs and face down blank pages and ticking clocks. To become proficient, writers have to develop some serious stamina, and it's critical that teachers understand what writing work is like so they understand the kind of stamina writers need" (20).

As the teacher, I model the analyzing of my drawing to the students as I am teaching, not only teaching them how to draw, but also teaching them how to describe what they have drawn. In this way, not only are they receiving a drawing lesson, but they are also receiving instruction on how to look for details that add to an illustration or a writing piece. This ability to see details is what I call adding color to our writing.

Not every writing lesson is started with a drawing lesson from me the teacher. Why? Because students need to understand that there are a variety of ways to organize their writings. But drawing is one way to help our students develop a strong voice in their writing and an enthusiasm for their topic.

As students begin to realize that their drawings will transform into writing pieces, students need to move away from creating expressive drawings with many details to making the drawing a prewriting activity. This doesn't mean that they cannot illustrate their work when completed; instead it separates illustration work as something that comes after they have done the writing work. Illustrating then can take on the role of adding to the text on the page by focusing on adding details in the illustration that help the readers understand the text.

One prewriting drawing method is to use the drawing as a quick sketch. First, provide the student with a 3x5 card to make their drawing. The drawing is not intended to be final illustration and therefore the student is only putting down ideas of what they want to have in their final illustration. Next, take that 3x5 card and tape it to the center of an 8 x 11 sheet of paper. The illustration is now the main idea or the center circle of an idea map. Around this idea map, have the students list different things going on in their picture, seen or unseen. There is no beginning, middle, or end of this idea map; it is strictly a list of ideas at this time, ideas that were inspired by the drawing.

When the idea map is completed, I will next hand the students a graphic organizer that has two main goals. One goal is for the student to decide who the main characters in the story are going to be and what if any type of conflict they are going to resolve. The second goal is for the students to plan what will happen in the beginning, middle, and end of their stories. If they are working on informational text, of course they won't have a conflict, but they will have to state opinions about what they are writing and support those opinions with reasons. Students easily plan their stories after they have created a wealth of information from which to draw from. (i.e. their idea map with their sketch in the middle.) This idea is supported again by Katie Wood Ray as she states, "Composers of words share many of the same understandings about meaning making with composers of pictures, so choosing to teach into illustrations doesn't necessarily mean that time for teaching writing is sacrificed. If teachers are willing to make a composing connection and show children how an illustrator's decision about pictures are a lot like a writer's decisions about words, she forms a bridge of understanding that nurtures children as both illustrators and writers" (15).

As the school year progresses it is amazing to watch the transformation in the students as they progress from wanting to be “done” to wanting to make sure the reader understands their piece. This feeling of accomplishment within our students comes from a focused period of time in which the students are allowed to develop both their artistic skills and their writing skills together as a single unit.

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Why Multigenre Research?

By Lisa Erickson

“First, you have to believe that the world of writing is larger than expository reports. You have to believe that students develop as thinkers when they write in a variety of genres. You have to believe that students learn best when immersed in self-chosen topics they are passionate about. You have to believe that high expectations and thoughtful teacher support lead to success.”

~Tom Romano

I do believe these things. I believe them because of amazing mentor teachers who, ten years ago, introduced me to Tom Romano, the “father” of multigenre research and to this style of writing. Mentors who allowed me into their classrooms and into the writing lives of their students, and into their own passion for multigenre research writing. I believe all of these things because I have seen them in my classroom, with my own students.

What comes to your mind when you hear the words “research report” and what comes to the minds of your students? The writing of a research report generally strikes fear into the hearts of everyone involved! I have rarely heard teachers thrilled about assigning and grading research reports or kids excited about writing them. This is particularly true when the topics and style of writing have traditionally been assigned and prescribed by teachers and/or have come from the district office. Topics that don’t interest the students and for which students have no desire to learn more about don’t inspire great writing.

Imagine your students being allowed to not only select the topic that they will research, but to also select how they will present that topic. In multigenre research, students can select a topic that they are passionate about and can use their interests, skills, and talents to present the project. After a study of the hundreds of genres in which they can write, students select genres appropriate to their topic to enhance the research that they have completed. In this age of technology, adding music, video clips, or other visual media is an excellent way for our tech savvy students to showcase what they have learned.

I have taught this style of research report writing over the last ten years with a full range of middle school students. I have had GATE students, special day students mainstreamed into my English class, students who speak minimal English, and a full gamut of EL’s and all levels of native English speakers. I have never had one of these students fail to successfully complete their multigenre research paper and have had few complaints about the project.

With the multigenre research project my students learn all of the components required of a traditional research paper including writing and revising. They are exposed to the real world genres of writing that they will

be expected to be able to read, write, and understand once they leave school. Multigenre research also can fulfill the expectations of Common Core writing – narrative, argument, and expository writing can all be incorporated in a multigenre research project while also allowing students the freedom to include poetry, art, and any other genre that fits their topic.

I am passionate about multigenre writing. It teaches the inseparable connection between reading and writing and allows our students to shine because they are writing about self-chosen topics about which they care deeply. There are many ways that this style of writing can be used to teach writing in our classrooms. One way it can be used is as a whole class writing project on a single topic of study with groups of students selecting the genre that they wish to use to present the topic. Multigenre writing also is a great way to move from the old fashioned literature circles to a whole new way to respond to literature – multigenre novel study.

The Common Core Standards are at the forefront of everyone's minds these days – we can't escape them. However, we can make them exciting and enjoyable for us as well as for our students. Multigenre writing requires that our students use mentor texts and examples, requires them to synthesize and integrate what they learn in their research, expects them to share what they have learned, and clearly builds a bridge from text, whether fiction or non-fiction, to writing. Students are highly motivated and involved in multigenre writing, and they actually want to work on the topics that they have selected. An added bonus – these multigenre papers are extremely interesting and, dare I say, fun for teachers to grade! Who could say no to a style of writing that meets or even exceeds Common Core Standards and is actually enjoyable for everyone involved!

Write from the Heart Every Day!

By Karol Eisenbeis

I was never a mile runner yet I excelled at the mile relay. Teaming up with three other young women to work in tandem and passing a baton on our way to victory inspires me personally and professionally today. Interestingly enough, the Latin word for racetrack is curriculum, and like the mile relay, designing and implementing curriculum is much better shared with other teachers. That's what makes the Great Valley Writing Project's Implementation Lab a positive experience for students and teachers.

In an implementation lab we build on strengths because we share the teaching role and observe the learners and each other. We are candid about the results. We can also make real time decisions. Did we have a plan? Yes. Did we change course? Yes. Our guiding light was our book study text, *No More I'm Done Fostering Independent Writers in the Primary Grades* by Jennifer Jacobson. This text helped us structure our writing workshop. Many of us thought we were doing writer's workshop until reading this book.

We found many ways to improve our teaching especially during "Quiet Ten," a ten-minute slice of independent writing. During "Quiet Ten," students and teachers write independently on topics of their choosing while listening to classical music. The importance here is for the teacher to be seen as a writer among writers. After ten minutes, the workshop continues. Teachers conference with individuals or small groups. Students listen and respond to each other about their current projects. Engagement is high because students know that writing takes time. They often return to a piece of writing they began in a previous session because they know they are authors and that making books takes time and stamina. Just like running, you don't attempt a marathon your first day of training. It's the same with writing. Routines, rituals, and practice are key ingredients for success.

As we prepare for the next racecourse, the 2014 and 2015 school year, we have so many ideas beyond the book that we learned from each other. From songs with motions to focused mini-lessons, and books to purchase, the team is better prepared to teach writing. I cannot think of a better way to prepare for the school year than in a classroom with real students and several teachers who pass the baton to the next runner while the other teachers cheer them on. Important steps taken together is like traveling a well-worn path. We've already removed the obstacles, which is what the book study plus implementing new ideas with real students accomplishes. We're in great condition for the road ahead. If we stumble, we simply help each other up!

Taking Academic Risks: Doable Projects that Integrate Career and College Readiness

By Darrell Wildt

Now that it is 2014, there is a greater urgency for teachers to be prepared and able to teach at the level of rigor that is expected in the CCSS. I truly understand the concerns of administrators and teachers, but I truly believe that more exposure, discussion, and professional planning time will help ease the pains of this transition. My reason for stating this is based on my own classroom and multi-faceted professional development experiences. From some very enriching professional experiences I have gained a better understanding of the goals of CCSS, but I also have realized how teachers and administrators could view this new set of standards not only as a big hill to climb in writing and mathematics, but also as a major paradigm shift in state assessments and how content and skills should be taught--especially in the shadows of NCLB.



Project based learning is not a new concept in education, but a deep integration of academic content knowledge commonly proves to be a challenge when it comes to the time required for rigorous assignments--including other concerns about the technical resources available to all students, and ascertaining relevant project ideas and resources for teachers and school programs that can also be accessible for a diverse range of students (considering skills and grade levels).

At the California Reading Association conference in Asilomar in 2013, I was exposed to a very engaging and doable class project by Shirley Manis. Shirley was an elementary teacher in the 1970s when the remains of a prehistoric mastodon were discovered on her father's property in Sequim, Washington. From the experience Shirley took her already passionate drive for teaching and turned it into a hands-on project for her students. So I immediately thought, how can I do something similar with my students? When I returned to my school site I shared the book and lesson information with my co-teachers, and I proposed that we do an expanded version of the project that could be integrated with our school site's thematic curriculum.

My initial idea was to draft a two part project in which students create a reality-based fictional civilization that would include ancient artifacts and other traces of their society. The first part would be the generating of fossils, artifacts, a whole class documented-project-presentation, and the burying of the student created fossils. This would require students to conduct research about an actual civilization and then to create articles, presentations, and artifacts reflecting the civilization. The second part would be done by another group of students. Each group of students would: dig to discover the fossils buried by the other class, conduct their own whole class research, document their research, and present their findings.



In order to better fit our school's thematic curriculum, my co-teacher and I decided to root the project in animal biology and evolution, which was very similar to Shirley Manis' experience with the mastodon excavation. Since there was already a running template in my mind with ideas inspired by Shirley's book *In A Scoop Of Dirt*, it was easy for me to lay out a series of assignments and student responsibilities that could be compiled into a cumulative project.

After planning the outline and scaffolded activities, I decided to let my students have a say in the design of the project's finer details and the delegation of student responsibilities. The concept of the project completed in two different phases was kept intact. The intent of having two phases was to keep the project from spider-webbing and consuming too much time from our core biology studies, and to also provide enough physical weathering and student forgetting time between the fossils being buried by one class and being discovered by another class. So, in early December 2013, after we had learned about the history of science, scientific methodologies, evolution, heredity and genetics, and a general overview of biomes, my core-class spent one day planning out a five-day project for researching and creating fossils for the animal that the other class would excavate, examine, and research. My initial project idea and proposal to students included this basic outline:

Day 1: Gather research information about an animal--time period, images, diet, climate, and animal type.

Days 2-3: Assign student responsibilities and providing individual assignment/product work time:

- A. Student Project Manager** (one student), **B. Animal fossil makers** (3-6 students),
- C. Plant fossil makers** (3-6 students), **D. Animal sketch artists** (2-4 students),
- E. Plant sketch artists** (2-4 students), **F. Animal article** (1-2 students),
- G. Vegetation article** (1-2 students), **H. General climate and time period article** (1-2 students),
- I. Compilation slide presentation** of animal information and related articles (1-2 students),
- J. Google Site creator/manager** (1 student)
- K. Archeology Project Documentation slide presentation** (1 student)
- I. Work cited page reviewed and compiled** (Project Manager)

Days 4-5: To be determined by students (we need to be finished with the individual student projects, and we need to review student work).

Based on the above information, students helped determine: the pace for the activities over the following five days, the level of quality that the whole class should expect for each individual product, the criteria of each assigned product, the animal and time period that was researched, and how student work would be assessed and reviewed by the whole class. Once we had this plan in place, I posted the newly revised project requirements and expectations on our class' Google Site, so the students knew that we were really moving forward with the project. From this outline, we had a whole class discussion about the variety of skills that were needed to complete this project to the level we desired.

The first day of the project, which was the research day, went very smooth since the students knew the goal and the purpose. We decided to use classroom computers and Google Documents to put all of our research information and resources in one source so the entire class had access to it. At the end of the research period, students were assigned a specific product to create, and the entire class nominated and voted on the student that would be the Project Manager. Students voted through a Google Form that I quickly created after the nomination process. It was established by the whole class that the student Project Manager would also be responsible for filling any gaps in student work that developed during student work time, so this student really would be a "manager" that had to facilitate team building while also maintaining a productive relationship of meeting project expectations with each student.

Days two and three were very efficient since students already knew their assigned products, and both the student Project Manager and I were free to facilitate the project's progression during this time. I made sure that I had all necessary supplies ready for the students in order to prevent any lag-time. The main supplies that were needed during this time were:

1. Pencils/Markers.
2. Printer/sketch paper.
3. Printed information for the article writers.
4. Printed images for the sketch artists.
5. Air-dry clay.
6. Newspaper/butcher paper for clay-working areas.
7. Paper towels--for cleaning.
8. Rulers.
9. Graph paper.
10. Computers for the Google Site creator, the Slide Presentation creator, and the student documenting the entire process.

Day four was designated by students to be the day for finishing the products, so they could review the status of

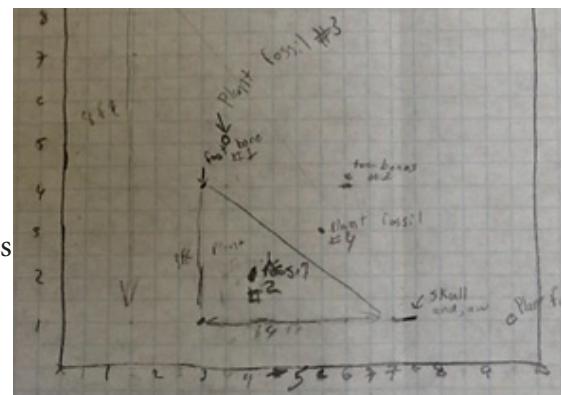
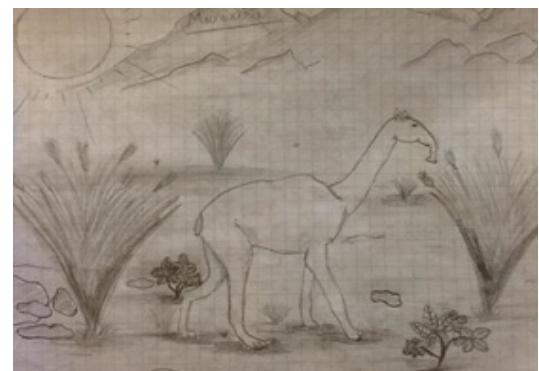
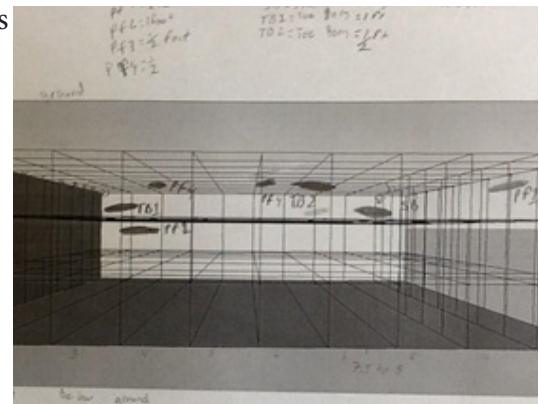
student work during the last half of class. The students decided that this would be best for everyone to see the work and to provide feedback for edits or fixes that could be done on the fifth day. Though I made some initial hints towards peer review, the students really became the main advocates of it because they saw each individual's work as representative of the whole class--especially since another class was going to be viewing this information in the future.

Day five went forward as planned with all sketches, clay models, and about half of the writing samples. The remaining writing samples needed additional edits and revisions (which I did anticipate). The additional revisions would be done prior to the actual excavation by the other class, so my core-class' website and resources would be available for confirmation and comparison with the other class' research and discovery of the fossils that my core-class students created.

Following the creation of the fossils and information products, I took a student volunteer to stay after school to help bury the fossils. In the future, I would like to incorporate this into the actual class time, but I decided this time it would be best to do it after school, since this project is in its trial run. The burial of the fossils utilized a 3D grid that was created by a student during the class time for creating products for this project, and we used the same student's suggested burial locations. Prior to the burial we had to establish the physical location on our burial grid, so these locations and directions could later be given to the other class. We also decided to modify the student suggested depth of the fossils based on the hardness of the soil. During the burial of the fossils, we took detailed notes about the locations and any modified measurements. We also took many pictures of the fossils prior to burial and after they were placed in the holes.

Once the fossils were buried it was time to draft a letter to the other class, so they would be able to relocate and discover my core-class student created fossils in the spring (mid-March 2014). Instead of giving the other class straight forward technical instructions, it was decided that my students would create a letter from a fictional archeologist (see the writing sample at the end of this article) that was related to one or more of the students in the other class. The letter from this archeologist would include information about the fossils that "fictionally" had already been discovered at this dig-site, the "mock" geographic location of the site, inferred ideas about the animal remains, the geological time period associated with the animal, and the coordinates that were laid out during previous "fictional" dig-sites. The purpose of this letter is to provide a narrower starting point for determining the type of animal that the fossils represent and to better hint at the best areas for digging (by expanding upon the prior "fictional" dig-sites).

In order to create this letter, students were put into pairs, and each pair had to create two things; a rough draft letter from a fictional archeologist and a mock "prior dig-sites and findings" map. All students created letters and maps had to be linked so that the descriptions in the letter reflected locations on the corresponding map. This process required students to view their class buried-fossils map in order to visualize what other "fictional" fossils could have been between the locations of their own class-created fossils. The "fictional" previous fossils that were mentioned in the letter narrative needed to be placed in a way that would allow the other class to better reconstruct the actual remains of the animal skeleton when it died. This reversal of thinking, or negative mapping was difficult for many students,



so I reserved one class period as a whole class collaboration for both the letter from the “archeologist” and the mock “prior dig-sites and findings” map.

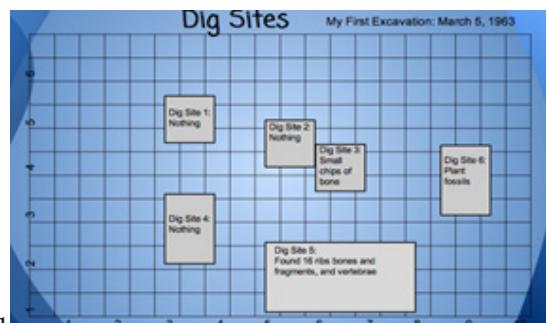
During the day reserved for reviewing student letters and maps, the whole class worked to compile, edit, and blend all student generated letters and maps into a single letter and map. To compile the letters, student pairs had to review letters written by other pairs. From this peer-review students proposed that certain portions of writings should be put into the final letter. Students used a shared Google Document to post these selected writings. The compilation of the map was done by each small group providing dig-site coordinates from their own mock “prior dig-sites and findings” map. Any overlaps of poorly placed “prior dig-sites” were adjusted. In the future, I may decide to have only one pair of students create the entire “prior dig-sites” map and the actual burial map for the created fossils, but I found that this whole class activity was still beneficial for reviewing graphing coordinates and line segments. The compiling student “prior dig-sites” maps also spawned student discussions about the plausible connections to geological events that could affect fossil placement--such as earthquakes or floods.

Around the time for Spring Break, both classes were either preparing to undercover, or they had already uncovered some of the fossils that were created by the other class. The goal of each class was to use the whole class-generated letter to relocate the burial sites, to discover the location of each fossil (based on expanding the previous mock “prior dig-sites and findings”), and to create their own “new excavation site map with the coordinates for all of their dig-sites. After each class had found the fossils, they had to re-examine the letter they were given so they could deduce the animal type and bone classification of each fossil. Using the suggested animal types that were provided in the letters, students were able to compare the fossils they discovered with relevant Internet, or other resource, images. After each class had concluded, with confidence, the type of animal and bones that their fossils are meant to resemble, they created their own sketches, rewritten articles, Google Site (to store and display their research), and a Google Presentation that summarized their findings and process.

Due to state and school program testing, the overall projected ended too close to the end of the school year, in order to allow each class quality time to examine and compare the overall fossil analysis and the student generated articles. This project will be revisited at the beginning of this next school year during the launch of the cultural-archeology project. The cultural-archeology project will use a very similar structure.

The initial goal by the end of the year was for both classes to share all of the materials that were created by students, so they could compare the conclusions of each class with the information that was originally generated by the “fossil creating class.” Students would have compared their conclusions in regards to the animal type, the inferred diet, the geological time period, and the identification of actual bone types--especially if fragmented fossils were reconstruction correctly.

An extremely important note about planning and troubleshooting that surfaced during the project is related to the actual burial of the fossils, and how this impacted the project for the students. As explained above, one class was very meticulous with the process and details of how they buried their fossils--mapping the exact locations and depths. The other class did not apply the same level of planning skills and concern to details, which led to two major complications for the class trying to make the “discovery.” The first complication was re-locating the fossils, which was made difficult because the second burying class did not accurately map their own fossil burial.



The other complication could be major, depending on the maturity level of the participating students. The students that buried the fossils for the second class failed to consider the importance of depth of the burial, which meant that their fossils were easily broken and redistributed when the surface soil was tilled in the early spring. Though this unplanned redistribution of fossils could be a huge setback for younger students, it actually made the digging and discovery more challenging and realistic for my older students (though I do recommend avoiding this when possible). We knew ahead of time that the soil was going to be tilled for the school garden, and that the burial depth of the fossils was critical, but unfortunately not all students took it as important...oh well, just another teachable moment about details.

Though the above project is extensive, it is important to restate that this was not done as a continuous project over an unbroken series of lessons. Instead the project was revisited at different times in order to allow for other topics to be explored for the sake of covering more standardized academic material without having an entire quarter or semester being consumed by one project. Also, not all teachers should feel pressured to create or take on such projects. I do believe that all teachers should be exposed to such ideas as plausible at some level with their student population. Teachers should also be encouraged, especially if they are motivated, (and if their project design falls within the parameters with what is safe for their student population and the school site facility) to take such risks.

Since such a project falls within the rigor and relevance of CCSS, teachers should have more professional development time that focuses on such integration and projects, even if they are only done on a small scale. The end result in such development will be an overall increase in rigor and real world applications of career related skills and academic knowledge--even at the lower end of the professional development spectrum.

Writing Sample (fictional whole-class letter)

September 25, 1964

My Dear Students,

I have spent the last few years of my life looking for the bones of ancient species in South America. So far at one specific site, I have discovered rib bones, a leg bone, and the fossils of plant from the time period of the animal. From my research on the possible species that this animal may be, I believe that the plants that have been fossilized may have been part of the animal's diet. So, uncovering any additional fossils will help determine the type of animal that has been found at this site, and this could lead to museum exhibit.

A few months back, while I was in South America, I found the bones of a strange animal in a fallow field. I'm not actually sure what it might be, but I believe it is one of the following; what it could be an ancient camelid, macrauchenia, llama glama, or a saiga antelope.

A recent injury has kept me from continuing my expedition, and this is why I have contacted you. It is up to you to fulfill my dream while also generating, your own professional experience. Due my recent injury, and my incomplete fossil discovery, the only information I can give you is the type of fossils I have found, and my previous dig-sites at this location. All of the fossils that I found were between 6 inches to 1½ feet below the current ground level, and I believe the other remains should be at the same depth. Please see my attached dig-site map so you can recreate my excavation site, so you can fill in the missing fossils that will help us create a museum exhibit. Be aware that some local farmers were rotating their fields, and this location may be used soon, so you should act quickly.

Dubious About Downsizing

The GVWP Writing Club at Fox Road Elementary

By Maria Shreve

I never know what Carol Minner, the Director of the Great Valley Writing Project, is going to have up her sleeve when I read one of her emails. Take this one from a couple of years ago, for example: "Hi Maria, I'm working with the Stan Co folks and Hughson District to provide an after school writing club at Fox Rd Elem. Would you be interested in teaching a group of students in a club atmosphere?" It sounded innocuous enough, but my mind quickly rewound to my last elementary school experience which entailed student teaching the second grade, after which time I realized teaching older students was definitely for me. Thirteen years post student teaching; I wondered how could I possibly transition from the mindset of teaching ninth grade to fourth and fifth grade? Simply put, I was dubious about "downsizing." Surprisingly, the more emails that Carol and I exchanged, the more enthusiastic I became, especially when she suggested my "use of Harris Burdick and how picture books are excellent springboards for writing."

I told Carol I had just done that lesson with my students with amazing results and asked if my 8th grade daughter Carissa Seth could come along as a helper. Carissa participated in the GVWP kids camp at CSU Stanislaus for two years and was a helper at the GVWP Ripon Demo lab the previous summer, and I stated, "This is a bit uncanny – we were in the car yesterday, and she said she wished she could help kids with writing, but she didn't want to sound like a know-it-all. She would sound knowledgeable to younger kids." Carol agreed with bringing Carissa on, and over the course of the next few months an agreement was made between the GVWP and the After School Program at Fox Road. Since TC's typically work in teams of two, the ASP tried to find a Fox Road teacher to assist me with no avail. Janet Oliver, the Fox Road ASP Site Coordinator, told me that ASP Leader Vanessa Ramos, a former 8th grader of mine (2004), would be there to assist me. And so on Monday, February 4, 2013, I arrived in Room 3, armed with a copy of *Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writer's Notebook* by Aimee Buckner, and a constellation of my own ideas from twelve years of teaching experience and collaborating with GVWP TC's, to approximately 20 fourth and fifth graders. We made introductions ("My name is Ms. Shreve, and I love marvelous mysteries..." or "My name is Carissa, and I love crazy cats") and progressed to personalizing notebook covers by affixing a Coat of Arms to the notebooks on which they wrote about their goals, favorite things, the person they admire most, their most unique qualities, and a personal motto that they live by. I encouraged students to bring a photograph, and when I showed them a photograph of me standing on my head, I was startled to see and hear every one of them in unison chanting, "Do it, do it." They had obviously practiced this chant. I looked at Mrs. Alcazar, who graciously gave us permission to use her classroom, and she did not seem surprised.

Our Writing Club met every Monday from 3:10 to 4:10, and I was surprised the second week when several students appeared who were not there the week before. I sent them over to a table with Carissa and she quickly got them caught up. We started off our writing notebooks with writing poetry by way of a "10 Things to Know About Me" poem, which I had observed at the Ripon Demo Lab the previous summer. I modeled my own poem, and as Vanessa, Carissa, and I interacted with the students, we ran across some wonderful writing, such as Aiden Pearson's line, "I may not be perfect, but I have better looks than my friend – wow!" and Diana Torres' line, "I hold on to some things forever like my family." For week three, I introduced the "Writing of the Day" with Buckner's prompt: "What do you think about your name" How did your parents come up with your name?" Not only were they enthusiastic little writers, but when I introduced the idea of author's chair, after Riley, the first brave soul shared hers, the hand of just about every student shot up along with the declaration of "I'm next, I'm next."

Over the next couple of weeks, I read a mentor text *The Magic Finger* by Roald Dahl to facilitate a discussion on what makes a story good and what holds your interest. I showed the students the *Mysteries of Harris Burdick* illustrations, which I placed on the walls of classroom for students to view and to serve as inspiration for stories. However, once the writing began, some of the kids weren't writing as much as I hoped, and I knew

why. Before I left for Fox Road, the lock to my classroom was jammed, and I couldn't get in. I had two choices: to either keep the 20 students at the Writing Club waiting for me and bring my mentor text student samples - or to leave then and there without the samples. I chose not to leave the kids waiting, and this experience revealed just how important a specific mentor text is. Yes, the Roald Dahl story and subsequent discussion helped, but it was not enough support for all students. However, the next week, I brought the student samples that I couldn't get to, stories that my former 7th graders wrote, and what a difference after I shared the stories—pencils were flying as students created wonderful plots, realistic dialogue, and beautiful imagery. At about this time, personnel changes were made in the ASP, and Vanessa was reassigned. Mrs. Alcazar had commented that she liked what she was seeing, and I asked her if she would like to join us. We brought the kids to the computer lab, and they went online, found the Harris Burdick illustrations, and incorporated them into their narratives.

Finally, with the Common Core in mind and only a couple of weeks left, it was time to make the leap – the leap from narrative writing to informative writing with cartoon character compare/contrast essays. I came up with this unique way to introduce students to informative writing in 2003, when I taught sixth grade, and I continued teaching this essay over the years when I taught 7th and 8th grade. I was a little unsure about whether the fourth graders would be able to do it, and after getting some advice from TC's Dawn Myers and Jill Waters, I realized that with scaffolding, it should work. Additionally, Mrs. Alcazar, who teaches 4th grade at Fox, told me that fourth graders were already familiar with Venn Diagrams and compare/contrast.

We began with a “Writing of the Day” prompt on a favorite cartoon character, shared our ideas, and brainstormed. I read them my sample essay, or mentor text, “Tweetie Bird vs. Road Runner,” and I used highlighting as a way to teach the block method of a compare/contrast essay – blue for the Tweetie Bird paragraph, pink for the Road Runner paragraph, green for the similarities paragraph. Rather than using a Venn Diagram for pre-writing, I introduced students to a three-column matrix in which there was a column for the first character (the blue paragraph), a second column for the second character (the pink paragraph), and a third column for similarities (the green paragraph). Color-coding aside, when I taught sixth grade, I discovered that the matrix method worked much better because the order of the columns was the exact order of the body paragraphs in the essay. We analyzed my sample essay and filled out a matrix based on the information in the essay, and then I said, “Now remember, we’re not only writing about what the character looks like. We’re writing about character traits, too. So, as we’re filling out our matrices, we want to organize the information so that everything related to appearance is in one section and everything related to character traits is in another. Otherwise, it will read like, ‘Tweetie Bird has yellow feathers, is obnoxious, has an orange beak, hates Sylvester, is small.’ Now that would be a mess.”

Students asked if they could look up their characters on the computer, and I said they could if they limited their computer time to five minutes. This helped them recall in detail what the characters look like. Mrs. Alcazar, Carissa, and I helped students with elaboration. One girl said that Angelica wears a dress, and I heard Carissa say, “What kind of dress? What does it look like?” Another student said that his character was funny. “What makes him funny?” I asked. Let’s put down a specific example on your matrix.” From the matrix, we progressed to the essay. Of course, the hardest part is getting started – even though I assured students that it was “just a simple introduction to let the reader know that they’re writing about.” I shared some sample introductions from previous essays, and as I looked at introductions students were writing, I’d point out the ones that worked well, such as the following: “Who are your favorite cartoon characters? Mine are Angelica and Susie from *Rugrats*,” or “Sunday morning without *The Regular Show*? I would just die. My two favorite cartoon characters are Mortichi and Rigbi.” Students followed their rubrics and with help from the three of us finished their essays.

This was the first time I had ever done a writing club of any kind, and with it came some challenges and surprises. Since the writing club met once a week for one hour, if a student was absent, it was extremely difficult for the student to catch up with the rest of the class. Also, there were some students who were checked out early every week, and those students lost some of their momentum. Not every student was able to get to the Cartoon Character essay, but every student left with a notebook of many pieces of writing to be proud of – and a new outlook on writing. As for me, I had a new outlook on fourth and fifth graders – that the one hour, once a week experience with fourth and fifth graders was the highlight of my week.



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