

Minnesota Writing Project Demonstration Lesson

Title: "Slice of Your Life"

Grade appropriate: High school

Objectives

Students will:

- Improve the way they relate to characters in literature.
- Use literary elements to enhance their writing.
- Examine an author's stylistic choices.
- Stretch their voice as writers.

MN State Standards:

- Read, analyze and evaluate traditional, classical and contemporary works of literary merit from American literature.
- Evaluate the impact of an author's decisions regarding word choice, point of view, style and literary elements.
- Plan, organize and compose narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive, critical and research writing to address a specific audience and purpose.
- Generate, gather, and organize ideas for writing.
- Understand the differences between formal and informal language styles and use each appropriately.

Background

- Students have just finished reading *The Catcher in the Rye*.
- Students have discussed how Salinger creates a memorable, dynamic character through language, symbolism, literary elements, etc.
- Students have recorded important events and conversations during three consecutive days of their lives using a three-day log.

Outline

- After students complete the three-day log, they write a story that shows a snapshot of their lives. Other guidelines are as follows:

- Point of view is first person limited (you are the narrator and main character, but you are not omniscient or all-knowing).
- Length is up to you—so make it no longer or shorter than it needs to be.
- Imitate the narrative style of *The Catcher in the Rye*, but to fit your personality.
- Your narrator can be a slightly fictional version of yourself (more courageous, more critical, for instance), or it can be the factual you. You may, and in many cases should, disguise characters and actions to protect the innocent and the guilty and/or enhance the story.
- Use your three-day log as a guide for plot, characters, and conflicts, but feel free to veer from it.
- Use interesting, realistic dialogue.
- Include in your story at least one example of each of the following literary elements: symbol, allusion, hyperbole, personification, simile, and metaphor.
- Make sure you are able to articulate what the theme of your story is.

Extensions and Adaptations

- You could use this activity or one like it with any book and any grade level.
- The best writing I ever get from my students is when they're writing about themselves. I have also found imitation to be an excellent way for writers to experiment with their voice.
- How could you apply this idea to your own classroom? Which book, story, or poem that you teach would be most effective for this exercise? If you are not a language arts teacher, how can you apply this idea to your discipline?

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