

Minnesota Writing Project

Demonstration Lesson Template

Title: "Envelope, please."

Grade appropriate:
(5-12, may be adapted)

Approximate Length of time to complete lesson/unit:
(2-3 days for this initial lesson)

Learning objectives and significance of lesson:

TLW analyze artifacts and draw some inferences about a character
TLW create an imagined writing voice
TLW envision a reading audience of one or more and address that audience
TLW select an appropriate written genre to express the voice of the character

Brief summary/outline:

(Is this lesson an intro? middle? end? All or part of a unit? Does it scaffold a certain learning?)

- + With a partner (or groups of 3-4,) students will "unpack" the envelope they are given. (Instructor can assemble the envelopes initially,* but adaptations can also involve the students in creating envelopes.)
- + Through collaborative conversation, students create an imagined "identity" for the character to whom the artifacts in the envelope belong. (What do the contents of the envelope suggest about the age, gender, language, class, ethnic background, economics, politics, philosophy/beliefs, level of education.) Students in each group reach a consensus about the owner of the artifacts (sample questions ** are included later in this lesson plan,) and on a chart (instructor provides it) students jot down the decisions they have drawn about who their "envelope" character is.
- + Next, the students brainstorm and write a list of the various types of genres this character might engage in, i.e., letter to the editor, how-to booklet, magazine article about travel/pets/cooking, congratulatory note to grandson, sermon, memo to teammates, graduation speech/retirement speech/acceptance speech.
- + While processing these ideas, students incorporate their thoughts about what topics, issues, and beliefs are important to this character. What kind of an employee, uncle/aunt, or neighbor might this character be?
- + What type of language would this character (as author) use? What vocabulary? What style of writing / speaking? How would this character's writing "voice" sound? What tone? What attitude? How would this character phrase his/her ideas?
- + How might this character's writing voice be adjusted to fit the audience to whom he/she is writing?
- + Once students have created a list of possible items this character might write, and after imagining an attitude, language, and style that could represent this character, students will...
 - a) collaboratively compose a piece of writing, creating the content in the "voice" of their character
 - b) each choose a different written item and individually create their own writing in the character's "voice"
- + Follow-up:
Share the created writings within each small group and among small groups. / Share the created character, the artifacts, and the written work in large group. / Display (desktop publish) examples of the work along with photos of the envelopes' contents.
- + Assessment:
Initial assessment can be informally based on each student's willingness to participate constructively in both discussion and writing, as the group *unpacks* and *gives voice* to the character, based on the artifacts.
- + Further assessment of individual participation in this activity could include the instructor's evaluation (and/or group member's evaluation) of...
 - a) individual student's journal reflections on how the artifacts helped him draw "character" conclusions
 - b) individual student's journal reflections on how he/she made decisions about voice/audience/genre
 - c) individual student's writing (in the character's voice) to share reflections about family, global events, national issues, personal hobbies, and other ideas (which the instructor / students can create)
 - d) individual student's written response to a list of CRITICAL questions (created by instructor/students)

[Extended idea: An example follows, showing how several (instructor-designed) questions could be used - especially with older students - to draw them into a critical thinking activity about stereotypes, legislation, philosophy, etc.]

SAMPLE CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS: Based upon the contents of the envelope and the discussion ideas you group shared, answer the following questions in 100 -150 words each.

- (1) Do you feel that any of your conclusions about your character represent stereotypes? Explain and reflect.
- (2) Select an item in the envelope and "refocus" what it could be saying about your character. Example: Maybe your envelope contained a newspaper clipping of a letter to the editor promoting a law banning cell phone use by all drivers. If your group decided that your character supports that legislation, ask yourself? What other reasons might there for you character to have that "clipping" in his/her envelope? (Is your character writing an opposing letter, is your character doing research about this topic, etc.)
- (3) Did any of your conclusions cause you to dislike (or like) character your group "unpacked"? Explain what philosophical distance you see between yourself and this character? Do you hold prejudices toward this character? Explain and reflect.

* **Preparing the envelopes**: Initially, it works well to try to collect artifacts (for each individual envelope) that really belong to one person. (Example: A *National Geographic* magazine, a clipping from a newspaper, a pet collar and tag, a few foreign coins, a travel brochure, a bow-tie, some shoe polish, an expensive watch, etc.) // In collecting items, remember to gather artifacts from many locations: kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, garage, junk drawer, laundry room, attic, cellar, linen closet, lunch box, school desk, church pew, band room, end table, sewing kit, mailroom, glove compartment, etc.

** **To guide the students in discussion as they create a character (with a writer's "voice,") and as they select a writing topic, an audience, and a genre, the instructor will provide a list of questions such as the following:**

WHO is the writer?

- + Who owns these items? Male? Female? Age? How educated is this person?
- + What might the ethnic background of this person be? The socio-economic status?
- + What does this writer believe in? Like? Love? Enjoy? Dislike? + About what topics might this character read and write?
- + Is this writer a native English speaker? Likely to speak/write in a formal voice?
- + LISTEN. Is this a person who speaks in slang, \$50.00 words, or fragments? / + ADD other ideas.

WHAT TOPIC / AUDIENCE is on the mind of this character (this writer)?

- + giving or receiving a birthday gift from a grandparent / + finding out about his/her soon-to-be college roommate
- + organizing a Relay-for-Life event / + studying J.D. Salinger's writing
- + seeing a Reese Witherspoon movie / + graduating from high school / + ADD other ideas.

WHAT AUDIENCE / GENRE fits this scenario?

- + Is this writer preparing a thank you letter to a grandparent/grandchild? / +Preparing a first letter to college roommate?
- + About to write to J.D. Salinger, asking him to lunch? / +Composing a Relay-for-Life letter to the editor for the newspaper?
- + Is this writer composing an acceptance speech for a volunteerism award / acting award / political nomination / retirement award / achievement award? / + Composing a poetic invitation for graduation? anniversary?
- + Could this writer be composing a poetic invitation for a graduation or an anniversary? + ADD other ideas.

Related Resources:

Dean, Nancy. *Discovering Voice: Voice Lessons for Middle School and High School*. Maupin House, 2005.

Drake, Susan M. and Glen A. Jones. *Finding Your Own Voice in Academic Publishing: Writing Your Way to Success*. New Forums Press, 1997.

Fletcher, Ralph. *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.

Metcalfe, Linda Trichter and Tobin Simon. *Writing the Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method for Finding Your Authentic Voice*. Ballantine, 2002.

Schiwy, Marlene. *A Voice of Her Own: Women and the Journal-Writing Journey*. Fireside, 1996. Schrecengost, Maitly. *Voice Whizardry: 36 Discovery Activities to Develop Personal Writing Voice*. Maupin House, 2004.

Yagoda, Ben. *The Sound on the Page: Style and Voice in Writing*. Harper Collins, 2004.

www.writingfix.com/6Traits/Voice.htm

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- 1.) In the study of literature units, students may... (put together character envelopes, and)
 - write in the voice of fictional characters from literature they are studying
 - write in the voice of a fictional character 10 years "beyond" where the literary story ends
 - write in the voice of the author of a literary work
 - write to the author, as a fan or a critic, in the voice of a character from the story
 - write in the voice of the selection's editor – to critique the work or to propose a sequel
- 2.) In the study of persuasive composition units, students may... (put together envelopes, and)
 - write in the voice of an opponent
 - write in the voice of the teacher / evaluator
- 3.) In the study of audience, students may... (put together character envelopes, and)
 - use the "character voice" to address issues upon which an "audience character" might take a stand
 - use the "character voice" to address a conflict / issue an "audience character" faces
 - use the "character voice" to address a hobby or a passion of an "audience character"
- 4.) Allow the students to create the envelopes...
 - about a character in a literary selection, about a fictional character THE STUDENT is creating
 - about an historical figure, about an author, about him/herself, about a friend
- 5.) Use *containers* other than envelopes. Use purses, camera bags, briefcases, hat boxes, beach bags, tool kits, make-up bags, etc. Use a container that "fits" the character!

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