

# Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson ---

**Title:**

Writing Toward Community: Connecting Writing to Real-World Publishing Opportunities

The following lesson on writing and publishing book reviews is simply one way of tying writing to public venues.

**Grade appropriate:** specifically for grades 5-9, though applicable to most

**Approximate Length of time to complete lesson/unit:** About two weeks for the entire process

**Learning *objectives* and *significance* of lesson:**

Ultimately, the purpose of this lesson—and any other lesson intent on extending students' writing voices to real-world audiences—is to engage students in authentic acts of communication, beyond the classroom.

A direct application of the reading-writing connection, this mini-unit on writing book reviews is intended to help students:

- Identify and infer the components (features) of book reviews by analyzing their reading of several movie and book reviews written by other teens from publication sources like *Voices from the Middle* or *Teen Ink* (either their paper magazine or their on-line source at teenink.com).
- Analyze their conclusions about the book review genre and its components by comparing and contrasting their ideas with peers in small and whole group discussions.
- Synthesize what they've learned about review features by writing their own book reviews to be submitted to teenink.com, the school library website, or as a gift of writing to the in-class libraries of other classes in the school.
- Understand or appreciate how writing about reading has real-world connections and publishing outlets. Students will ideally see how this medium, unlike book reports, serves teens and is used by them. The goal is to motivate participation and purpose by contributing to a publishing community of young adult writers.

**Brief summary/outline:**

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

This lesson covers the basics of a small unit on book reviews, meant to be a more authentic assessment connected to students' independent reading. (Based on a given month's reading, a student will select the book that ignited interest, questions, or disdain.)

Day 1: > Introduce the "real" use of reviews.

- Show movie reviews from *TeenInk* (magazine or on-line source). Discuss as a whole-group what kind of information (features) are included in a few movie reviews. This gives a "common ground" reference point to start discussing book reviews and their features later.
- Discovery learning: Students review reviews written by middle schoolers from *Voices from the Middle*. In their notebooks (or on a provided worksheet guide), students draw four boxes, assigning a 1, 2, 3, or 4 to a box. These numbers coincide with the four sample reviews that have been mounted on construction paper for each group of four students. In each group, students rotate cards, spending five minutes on each. They record what kind of information (ie: summary info., awards, reviewer's opinion, etc.) is mentioned in each review. Passing all four cards will take

about 25 minutes. To close, small groups discuss their notes, going around the group to let each person share at least two observations made about review features.

#### Day 2: Opening activity:

- > As a graffiti wall activity, each group writes the features they noticed from their reviews from the previous day. (Since this writing is done on large pieces of paper posted around the room, a teacher may decide to have students take a quick walking tour to add to the later discussion about reviews' similarities or differences.)
- Review "found features" of reviews as a class, usually prompted by the top of a worksheet guide. Students take notes. The features we usually end up with are: summary, don't give away the ending, reader's opinion and recommendation, author's style, life lessons/themes, conclusion, and a category of other features not always found in reviews, like ratings, awards, author's writing history, etc.
- A chart with these features along the side of a table is also on the worksheet guide. Students will use this the following day when they explore teen-written reviews at [teenreads.com](http://teenreads.com) or [teenink.com](http://teenink.com). They note how at least two other reviews on-line use the book review features.

In the following days:

- Mini-lessons on writing elements (ie: a "hook" involves a number of strategies—opening questions, scenarios, facts, anecdotal narrative accounts, etc.—to grab a reader's interest or introduce the piece's main idea or message).
- Through mini-lessons, other skills can be addressed, such as embedding text quotations to support comments about author style or theme. These lessons about convention, grammar, or writing style take on more relevancy with repeated anticipation about publishing on-line. Visit [www.teenink.com](http://www.teenink.com) to submit reviews.

#### Related Resources:

Atwell, N. (2007). *The Reading zone*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Rief, L. (2007). Writing: Commonsense matters. In K. Beers, R.E. Probst, & L. Rief (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy: Turning theory into practice* (pp. 189-208). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

On-line sources: [www.teenink.com](http://www.teenink.com) or [www.weeklyreader.com](http://www.weeklyreader.com)

On-line class bulletin board: [www.nicenet.org](http://www.nicenet.org)

#### Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- Students could also practice moving features around in their reviews. How does the review change if a quote introduces the piece instead of concluding it? Or, as mentioned, return to the piece for "in-context" discussions about combining sentences or improving word choice/tone. Experimenting with the review can help students see the writing as more than a quick, once-over draft, done just to "get the assignment done."
- For a creative extension, students could trade reviews and pull a phrase or line from a peer's review to turn into a quickwrite activity. Such an activity can be an interesting way for students to get writing feedback (ie: Is there a line included that is poetic enough for a reader to keep working with it?)
- Extend "features" into Atwell's letter-essays, noted in *The Reading Zone* (2007). Use the language of opinion-based reading responses and skills in a variety of real-world ways (in author letters, on wikis or on-line class bulletin boards, on a school's closed-circuit TV program, featuring students talking about their book picks, etc.

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