

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson ---

Title: Encouraging Growth & Reflective Practice through Writing History Interview

Grade appropriate: 4-college

Approximate Length of time to complete lesson/unit: 50 min.

Learning objectives and significance of lesson: This activity is intended to help guide students through the initial phases of thinking of themselves as writers and working together in a community of writers. The objectives of the writing history essay is for students to have an initial point of reflection at the start of the semester, for the class to begin their writing groups by exploring writing experiences together, and for students to share with their teacher some insight into their own writing lives. This activity involves in-class writing, critical thinking, posing questions to audience members, emphatic listening, synthesizing, responding, and reflecting in an active social environment. Student letters of reflection on their writing growth and process can serve as evaluative measures within semester portfolios.

Students explore their writing history by:

- Interviewing a classmate
- Practicing emphatic listening and questioning
- Describing and recording their classmate's responses
- Reflecting on particular writing experiences, as well as their own writing process
- Engaging in storytelling of particular events that have shaped their writing lives
- Describing (pre-writing) their own writing experiences to a classmate
- Writing a descriptive and reflective essay about their personal writing lives
- Gaining insight into their peers' writing experience history, as well as their own

Brief summary/outline:

Writing Experiences Interview:

Today's assignment should accomplish many goals as we begin getting to know one another and working with our writing. It should:

- 1) allow each of you to get to know another person in class
- 2) give you an opportunity to talk about and reflect on your own writing
- 3) prepare you to write an essay about your writing history

Studies have shown that talking about, studying, and reflecting on our own writing is one important way toward improvement. Conduct a frank, yet casual discussion with one other classmate. Be sure to allow each person to carefully address each of the questions posed. Take neat and complete notes on your partner's responses to the questions below. Each person's interview should take about 20 minutes. At the end of the class period today, return the completed questionnaire to your partner. Questions about writing:

1. Tell me about your earliest memory of writing. Who taught you to write? How did you learn to write?
2. Who has had the most impact on your writing and why? What advice/lessons have they provided that were (are) helpful?

3. Tell me about a negative writing experience. Who and what was involved in the experience? How has this experience influenced your writing?
4. Now tell me about a positive writing experience. Who and what was involved in the experience? How did this experience impact your writing?
5. What piece (s) of writing are you most proud of? Why?
6. Tell me about the kinds of writing you enjoy most. What about these kinds of writing make them enjoyable?
7. What kind of feedback from others (peers or instructors) is most helpful? What kind of feedback is not particularly helpful? Why?

Related Resources:

Anson, Christopher M. Scenarios for Teaching Writing: Contexts for Discussion and Reflective Practice. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with Alliance for Undergraduate Education, 1993.

Belmonte, Dominic. Teaching from the Deep End: Succeeding with Today's Classroom Challenges. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press, 2003.

Hillocks, George. Teaching Writing As Reflective Practice. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

MacGregor, Jean. Student Self-Evaluation: Fostering Reflective Learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. Reflection in the Writing Classroom. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998.

White, Edward M. Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide. 4th Edition. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2007.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

Writing History Essay or Letter:

Now that you have thought about and talked about a few writing experiences from your past, write an essay introducing yourself to me and your writing group. Reflect back on your interview responses. Tell us about yourself and what makes you the writer and person you are today. What kinds of writing experiences have shaped you?

What have your writing experiences been like? Do you enjoy writing? What kinds of writing do you most enjoy? Least enjoy? Who has had the greatest impact on your writing? Why? What was your best writing experience? Your worst? Why? Tell us some details. What kind of feedback is most helpful to you as a writer?

What goals do you have for yourself as a writer? What do you hope to accomplish this semester? Are their particular strengths or weaknesses you'd like us to be aware of? How can we best help you become a better writer?

For additional information, contact:

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