

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Title of lesson: Learning to write dialogue/memoir brainstorming

Suggested grade/age: 9- 12, though it could easily be adapted to younger grade levels

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 1- 2 class periods

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

(Why is this lesson important in the development of your students' skills or knowledge? What do you want students to learn or be able to do? What "best practice" does this lesson incorporate?)

There are a few key reasons to do this lesson. First, it teaches students the basic mechanics of writing a dialogue. Second, it provides a brainstorming opportunity as students begin to work on writing a memoir, a snapshot of an important relationship. Third, the assignment encourages the students to consider and develop vivid and precise word choice (focusing on specific verbs).

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

(What steps do you take to implement this lesson in your classroom? Where is this lesson located in the school year or unit—beginning, middle, end? Does this lesson scaffold or build to a culminating assessment or demonstration of learning?)

This lesson comes after students have read, discussed and written about a variety of texts that focus on parent-child relationships. At the time of this lesson students have just been given the culminating assignment of writing a memoir piece, which would reveal an important aspect of their relationship with their parent(s).

- Individual activity: Quick write about a recent conversation with one of your parents. The conversation could be an in-person, e-mail, telephone, or text conversation. Describe what the conversation was about. Indicate who began the conversation, and who ended it/how it ended. Describe the tone of the conversation.
- Students pair and share the gist of what they wrote
- Whole class activity: review the conventions of basic dialogue writing: quotation marks, punctuation, speaker, verb choice, new line and indented with each change of speaker. Using a projector: layer the conventions, using different colors for emphasizing the different conventions (for example: verbs in red, speaker in blue, words said aloud in yellow, etc).
- Individual activity: brainstorm a list of speaking verbs (asked, said, inquired, yelled,

retorted, etc). With a partner, compare lists. Using post-its write down 2-5 verbs that you believe are so common (basic) that all other pairs will have these verbs. Then choose 10-15 verbs that are specific, vivid, juicy (high level, which might vary depending on your group of students).

- In pairs, or as a whole group, begin sorting verbs into categories based on the type/tone of the conversation. (i.e. angry, romantic, defensive, lecture, fearful, etc.)
- Whole group: share lists of verbs, clarify meanings/connotations.
- Individual activity: using what you wrote in your quick write, write a dialogue which incorporates the vivid/juicy speaking verbs.
- Pairs: students share their dialogue with a partner. When appropriate they help one another, through probing questions, with vivid verb choice (speaking verbs).
- Perform dialogues. Dialogues should be short, only two or three exchanges. Student audiences should determine the “tone” of the conversation, guessing the verb choice.
- Day #2/#3: Teacher shares her own memoir piece, which focuses on a conversation with one/both her parents. Students then respond to the piece by identifying parts of the text, which are most telling/showing about the relationship. Students should attempt to describe how the teacher/writer feels about her relationship based on the memoir shared.
- Next steps: as necessary students will continue to brainstorm about memorable moments with their parents. Pre-writing...then drafting.

Related Resources:

(What technology, articles, books, or supplies do you recommend?)

Reading selections: These are read and discussed before this activity

Non-fiction articles: *How my Son Got His Name*, Rich Cohen
 At 16 I Gave Him Up, Could We Try Again, Meredith Hall

Short stories: *Trip in a Summer Dress*, Annette Sanford

Children’s books: *Love You Forever*, Robert Munsch

The Kissing Hand, Audrey Penn

Memoir: *Don't Cry Dad*, Laura Loken
Ghost Mother, Michele Bender
Unspoken Years, Kristin Sester
The Last Kiss,
The Second Leaving, from *The Latehomecomer*, Kao Kalia Yang

Drama: *Fences*, August Wilson

Poetry: *First Hour*, Sharon Olds
Bedecked, Victoria Redel
He isn't just a Dad to me, Brittney Scott
First Love, Monica D'Auria
I think, Francine Pinnock
My Mother's Hands, Andrea Lobue

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

For K-3: draw the conversation, using dialogue bubbles/comic strip format instead of conventions for written text. Collectively discuss/decide how they would show emotion/tone through the visuals (text size, facial expressions, illustrations).

Comic Life (Technology): This is not for teachers who wish to teach the standard format for dialogue, but could be useful for ELL or special education students, or for an art class. This would require that students consider their word choice carefully and write dialogue in such a way that it is revealing about the characters/people or advancing the text in a meaningful way (rather than filler dialogue...just to make the story longer).

Refer back to texts that the class has already read. Identify dialogue. Note speaking verb choices and brainstorm other verbs that might have made the dialogue "come alive" in a more powerful or revealing way.

For additional information, contact:

Julia Shepherd, Julia.shepherd@spps.org