

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson ---

Title of lesson: Using Play-Doh to Teach the Writing Process

Suggested grade/age: Middle school (may be modified for elementary/high school)

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 80 minutes

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

- Students will learn the writing process of pre-writing/brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing through sculpting with Play-doh

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

This lesson is used to introduce a short story writing unit to illustrate the processes a writer goes through to create a final product, especially revising and conferring.

- Introduce Essential Questions: What process does a writer go through to produce a final piece? How is a writer like a sculptor?
- As the students begin to play with the play-doh and get the feel of the material, discuss the material of writers (words)
- Introduce the “creator” and the “critic,” explaining the creator gives the sculptor (or writer) ideas during pre-writing, and the critic helps the sculptor (writer) make decisions in the later stages of the creative process
- Discuss the importance of the audience (other students and teacher in the classroom) in what will be created
- Explain the purpose sets a path for the piece, which is to create a pencil holder
- As the students work, brainstorm together purposes for writing (inform, instruct, entertain, persuade, explore thoughts/feelings, etc.)
- Stop and have the students examine what they have done
- Instruct the students to mash up their creation to discover new ideas from their creator
- Explain how the sculpting process is like the writing process:
 - Pre-sculpting—Pre-writing/Brainstorming
 - Drafting—Drafting
 - Revising—Revising
 - Editing—Editing
 - Presenting/Displaying—Publishing
- Brainstorm with the students what they would like to achieve in the piece so they have a focus while they are creating: How will they know if they have made a good pencil holder? (aesthetics, function, creativity)
- Stop again and have the students examine what they have done
- Instruct the students again to mash up their creation to begin a first draft, using the ideas from the pre-sculpting/brainstorming process (allow about 5 minutes of work time)
- Explain that a writer, like a sculptor, thinks about how the audience will respond to their piece and can stop at any point in the process and get feedback from a partner

- Have the students turn to their neighbor and ask, “Do you know where the pencil will go?”
- Explain that if it is clear where the pencil goes in the pencil holder, the piece has achieved unity or meaning
- Discuss how revision means to “see again.” Guide the students to look at their pencil holders from different points of view (from one side, to the other, the front, back, up close, and far away)
- Share what the students noticed and what they want to refine in their designs
- Explain that writers refine their writing at all stages, and can refine by looking at their work from another point of view or by getting feedback from a partner
- Students confer briefly and share the ideas they got from their partners
- Explain it is time for detail work, or editing. As the students trade pieces of play-doh with others nearby, explain that writers do detail work in their writing too, checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation near the end of the writing piece
- Remind the students that details are finishing touches, and a piece can have a lot of really neat finishing touches but if the piece doesn’t have unity, it won’t have meaning
- To display projects, ask the students to write their name and title of their creation on a notecard at their desk.
- Allow a few minutes to move around the room and admire the work of others
- Return to seats and share what the students admired in the work of others and what they learned about their own creative processes

Related Resources:

Faucette, Rosemary. *Ideas Plus Book 15*. NCTE, 1997.

<http://forums.atozteacherstuff.com/showthread.php?t=62544>

“How to Make Playdough (Play-Doh).” Instructables. 2010. 13 July 2010.

<http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Make-Playdough-Play-doh/>.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- Write a reflection on the play-doh writing process. Where did your favorite ideas come from? How did it feel to “mash up” one idea and start over again? What lessons can you use in your own writing?
- Incorporate other media for sculpting (beads, feathers, glitter, etc.)