

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Title of lesson: Writing as Pre-Reading: One Way to Find Meaning (and Joy) in Texts: Valuing the Primacy of Writing

Suggested grade/age: Adult ELs in ABE setting, but highly adaptable to any age

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: One hour, but highly adaptable

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

How we as teachers value writing is an important question to ask ourselves. Where do we put writing in our curriculum? Is it ALWAYS in response to a text? Do we include writing as a way to ENTER a text? This lesson is adapted from scholar [Charles Moran](#) who added weekly creative writing prompts to his college-level literature class. He would craft a prompt that would elicit similar writing (in voice, description, purpose) as a page from one of the studied texts. This was NOT to emulate the author, but used as an exercise for the practice of writing like writers and reading like writers. The texts that he used, prompts that he wrote, and student work produced can be viewed in the scholarly article hyperlinked above. Moran found that with his weekly creative writing prompts, not only did students' expository writing improved, but they also found it fun! Thinking that this would be a good way to have learners write BEFORE reading a text, I adapted Moran's idea for adult ELs; the first two objectives are general and can be used for any prompt from any text. The remaining objectives are specific for this particular lesson:

- 1) Learners will be able to read and understand the academic language in a creative writing prompt.
- 2) Learners will be able to write for 20 minutes in response to the prompt.
- 3) Learners will be able to understand the meaning of *methodical*.
- 4) Learners will be able to find meaning in the different word forms of *describe* found in the prompt.
- 5) Learners will be able to identify and sequence behaviors in writing that illustrate methodical behavior.
- 6) Learners will be able to find meaning in the first two paragraphs of Jhumpa Lahiri's essay "Rice."

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

This lesson followed the completion of digital stories produced in conjunction with the U of MN and the Immigrant Story Project. Learners in my class produced narratives where they traced a specific object that remained with them through their migration history. Mentor texts used for this project included digital stories produced by U of MN students. Wanting to find a mentor text to read after completion of the project, I discovered "[Rice](#)" by Jhumpa Lahiri. The first two paragraphs described the methodical behaviors of her father, and I knew that my learners would need assistance entering this text. The following lesson was instituted:

- 1) Discussed meaning of *methodical* and how it comes from the word *method*.
- 2) Modeled descriptions of methodical behaviors (emphasized *show not tell*)
- 3) Students shared examples of methodical behaviors.

- 4) The following prompt was given and reviewed as group. Special attention was given to the academic word forms of *describe*, *description*, *descriptive*:

Describe someone who is methodical. This person can be real—a family member, a teacher, someone in your community—or he or she can be made up, a fictional character. In your **description** include the behaviors that make this person methodical. Include **descriptive** detail so readers can picture this in their minds. Maybe this person is very methodical in how they think, dress, drive, grocery shop. You are the writer, so you can decide what to include. Begin your paragraph with the sentence starter:

----- is a methodical person.

- 5) Students were given 20 minutes for their writing.
- 6) Then, students shared writing with partners and then with whole group.
- 7) After all writing was shared, students divided up into partners to read the first two paragraphs of “Rice.”
- 8) Students annotated paragraphs with questions, comments, and circled words they didn’t know.
- 9) Lastly, students came back to full group to discuss the paragraphs.

Assessment:

1) At the end of the semester, learners selected 3 of their favorite “writing exercises” as these 20-minute writing activities were called, and then revised them for their portfolio. A reflective paragraph was expected as to why these paragraphs were selected.

Related Resources:

Moran, Charles. “Teaching Writing/Teaching Literature.” *College Composition and Communication* 32.1 (1981): 21-29. Print.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

This unit can be adapted to any text where pre-reading activities could include writing. For this particular demonstration, I focused on the meaning of *methodical* and descriptive writing because I wanted the learners to be able to enter that particular text. However, I have used this as a way to enter into other fiction texts. For example, if a teacher would like to focus on a section of fiction text written in first person, the prompt could be adjusted to ask for that. Here is a creative writing prompt that I had written before learners were to read a section in Julie Otsuka’s novel *When the Emperor Was Divine*:

You are telling this story from the plural first person (we). Your family is coming back to your home after not seeing it for over three years. What do you notice? How does the house look? Is anything broken? What does the yard look like? Be descriptive. *Show not tell.*