

Minnesota Writing Project

---Demonstration Lesson---

Title of lesson: Thick and Thin: Asking Strong Research Questions

Suggested grade/age: Middle school, or students who are just learning how to do research. However, it may also serve as a nice reminder for older students.

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: ---

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson

Students will be able to ask strong (“thick”) research questions to assist them in doing quality research on a topic. Students will also discuss the implications of living in the digitized “information age” (i.e., how do we effectively go beyond superficial/basic information and dig deeper into a topic or concept?).

Brief summary/outline of lesson

1. Revisit topics that students have selected to research. Discuss why we are completing a research project/presentation *prior* to reading our next class novel.
2. Present students will questions surrounding life in the “digital age.” (Turn and Talk)
 - a. How does living in an “information age” make a research project easier?
 - b. How does it make it more difficult?
 - c. So...what is research? And how do we do it well?
3. Mini-Lesson on “Thick” and “Thin” Research Questions
 - a. Share and discuss learning target (“I Can...” Statement), make sure students are clear on the learning goal for the day and know the expectations for the lesson.
 - b. Provide sentence starters that show students what “thin” research questions generally sound like as well as what “thick” research questions sound like.
 - c. “Lightning Research” Group Activity: Students get into small groups (4-5 people) and are presented with a series of questions. Their goal is to simply find the answers to all of these questions using the usual methods they use when finding the answer to something. They will be competing with each other to see who can answer each of the questions the fastest and with the most accuracy.
 - i. Discuss that all of these questions were “thin” questions. They contained relatively important information, but their answers are easy to come by and we should be digging deeper to find out more about our topics.
 - d. Show students how to access digital databases at the school. Inform them that an encyclopedia (Britannica, for example) is a great place to start learning about your topic so that you can start composing meaningful research questions.
 - i. Model reading an encyclopedia entry to show students how to generate “thick” and meaningful research questions. Using The Beatles as an example, we will read the

article as a class, and then I will just tell them what I'm curious about and the questions that I have after getting basic information about the band.

- e. Students will then be instructed to find and read an encyclopedia entry on their topic in order to gain basic knowledge about their topic and to begin drafting "thick" research questions.
 - i. If time, share some of the questions that students have composed for their topics.

Related Resources

Schmidt, Gary D. *The Wednesday Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. Print.

"The Beatles." Britannica School, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 7 May. 2017.

school.eb.com.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/levels/middle/article/the-Beatles/390013. Accessed 13 Jul. 2017.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs

- Allowing students to explore *beyond* their topics.
- Segueing into a discussion on website credibility.
- Printing encyclopedia articles for students.

Lesson by Jonathan Nelson