

# Day 1 – Welcome to 8<sup>th</sup> Humanities!

<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>DATE</b>
Humanities	Hardy/Wacholz	08	8.22.18

## Overview

This is the first unit for the 8th graders in Humanities. Teachers will frontload the purpose of the class – primarily essay writing – through the lens of affirmation and growing confidence as writers. Over the three days, students will be introduced to the main goals of this class and practice some of the classroom writing norms.

Day 1: SWBAT to gather ideas and evidence to prepare to write “Essays with an attitude.” Students will do an idea gathering activity to get them ready to do a diagnostic essay.

Day 2: SWBAT generate effective evidence to prepare them for their diagnostic essay. Students will use mentor texts to analyze how the author proves their point and organizes their information. Students will brainstorm evidence around their topic and get feedback from peers. Intro to Reading Circles.

Day 3: Time for diagnostic writing (if possible, reserve computers to look at evidence).

Day 4: SWBAT give feedback on each other’s essays using affirmation through the Read Around process.

**Enduring Understanding:** My writing is successful when I find my own style and voice and convey my story, using grammar and organization as a tool for self-expression

### ELA Standards:

8.1 - I can lay out an argument about a topic/text and make it clear why my argument is important and valid.

8.4 - I can introduce my position and orient readers to the overall line of argument that I plan to develop.

## PHASES

## TEACHER GUIDE

## STUDENT GUIDE

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>TEACHER GUIDE</b>	<b>STUDENT GUIDE</b>
<b>S</b>	SWBAT to gather ideas and formulate an argument to prepare to write “Essays with an attitude”	“I can get ready to write an essay by choosing a topic I care and know a lot about.”

**PHASES**

**TEACHER GUIDE**

**STUDENT GUIDE**

<p><b>INFORMATION</b></p>	<p>“If you have an opinion, you can write an essay. We’ve been teaching middle schoolers for a while now, and we know you have opinions, perspectives, and a strong sense of justice. In this class, we are going to hone the tools of writing to get you ready to publish your opinions and persuade others. We also know that writing is personal and individual, so we also want you to know that in this class we are aiming to write ‘Essays with an Attitude,’ meaning you can and should put your own individual style/stamp on what you write.”</p> <p>“In order to get started, let’s start finding a topic for our first writing assignment for this class. It is a writing diagnostic to see how you hone your craft so far. Never fear, I know we just got back from summer vacation, so we will do this piece by piece. The first step is to choose a solid topic. Around the room you will find questions on the whiteboard (points around the room). (Student name), can you read one of the questions? (Continue until all questions are read).</p> <p>“Find a partner or work individually and brainstorm ideas that answer the questions around the room. Use the markers to write your ideas under the questions. We’ll take about 7 minutes for this process, stand up and answer those questions with</p>	<p>Students are asked by the teacher if they have ever read or seen an opinion article in a newspaper or if they have published themselves. They also can participate in the full class discussion at the beginning of class by giving some examples of strong opinions they have that they would write into a newspaper about before we get started to get the creative juices flowing.</p> <p>Students walk around the classroom and answer questions written on the board. Examples include “What makes you want to rise up and say something?” “What makes your blood boil?” “What do we need more of in this world/country/school?” (can be all separate questions) “What is it that people don’t understand that you know but aren’t asked about?” “What is something you see a lot in the media that you want to see changed?”</p>
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**PHASES**

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<p><b>VERIFICATION</b></p>	<p>As a group, we look around the room and take in the ideas we have come up with. If ideas are too ‘pet-peevey,’ acknowledge that (it is middle school, after all) and see how we can expand the ideas into social justice issues by taking suggestions from the class.</p>	<p>After taking a look around the room, students should find some they think will be the strongest for writing a longer essay about. Students should write those topics on their paper.</p>
<p><b>ACTIVITY</b></p>	<p>T introduces free writing activity to see how much students know already about this topic and to see if there is enough there to eventually craft the diagnostic essay about it. “Free writing to a prompt is going to be a big part of this class. Sometimes, it’s just important to ‘puke’ the ideas out of your brain onto the page. You never know where it will take you and what new ideas you will discover. I want to emphasize that these are not graded, but will help make you writing stronger through developing your ideas. For now, we will take 10 minutes to write as much as you can about this topic. If you run out of ideas on this topic, choose another one that lights your fire and see where that takes you!”</p>	<p>Students write to the prompt:  Which of these topics ‘lights a fire’ within you? How has this topic affected you?</p>

**PHASES**

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<b>SUMMARY</b>		
	<p>T walks around while students are writing and hands out cut up postcards to put them into groups of 5. After students are done writing, T has them get into groups by putting the pieces of the postcard together.</p> <p>While students are reading each other's ideas, T conducts formative assessment of how students are orienting their topics into a line of argument.</p>	<p>Directions for what students should do are on the smartboard. In groups, students should share on sentence/idea/paragraph from their free writing while the others listen. The listeners can also jot it down in their notebooks if someone says something that sparks them. Students should be ready to share or summarize one idea from another student whole group (ask student ahead of time if they want to be named).</p>

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I write this reflection with great excitement on the different perspectives I will have on teaching writing this year. Because of this excitement, I want to get this year started on the right foot. I know that this year I will have to fight against the ingrained ideas of writing instruction that have negatively affected my ability to help students who are already not confident in their writing. The main philosophy guiding my teaching will be more of “what is going well that we need more of?” rather than focusing on what is not going well. In order to achieve this, my lessons will take careful scripting of direct instruction and planning on how to frame writing growth in a positive sense. In this reflection, I will look back on how my writing instruction was last year and compare it to how I want to do it this year to get a better idea of where I have been and where to go next.

Last year, there were many times when students were penalized with zeros for not getting work done. There were some students who never achieved more than an F or D as a grade because they did not write something that aligned with the Lucy Calkins standards my co-teacher and I were using. The idea behind this was innocent, or so we thought: to show students honestly where they were on the road to a solid DBQ that would earn them at least a 3 on the AP History exam or any other AP exam they would take. This, after all, was the goal of the class, to create something that would have a purpose, another hoop to jump through to be sure, but something that would be practical by helping students put \$2,000 in their pocket. Armed with this knowledge, students would be able to take any criticism of their writing, because in the end it would make them better and stronger at the craft.

The problem was, this approach did not work for the kids who needed it the most. Many students did grow in their writing and confidence. This came through the many opportunities for practice and their focus on the “glows” that we gave students. The fact that some students grew also strengthened my resolve that what we were doing was right, and that the other students just needed to have a better mindset about building their essays in the ‘right’ way. To let them write it any old way also would not help them earn a 3 on AP and get them that money, and I could not fail these students

by lowering my expectations. Although I thought these attitudes came from a good place, they actually came from a place of rigidity and hardness; rather than imagining how writing could be more inclusive and creative, I was being stiflingly prescriptive.

I have thought about one student in my class, Nathan (whose name I have changed to protect privacy) a lot this summer as I aim to improve my writing instruction. Nathan was one of those students who clearly understood the content on a deeper level. In his full-class answers, he went deeper into the material and asked great questions. When it came to writing essays, he resisted getting started, and then when he did, he would write about 10 sentences with no punctuation and turn it in. I tried to help by explaining the rules of punctuation and giving him a template where he had to essentially “fill in the blank” for a successful essay. It was all to no avail, and the process just frustrated him (and me) further. I just imagine what it could have been like for him if I had spent more time grading him on what he did do rather than what he didn’t. The year could have gone so much differently.

This lesson sequence should help prepare students for their diagnostic essay more than the lesson sequence last year. The lesson components draw heavily from Linda Christensen’s *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*, but there are a few things I have tweaked to fit my 8<sup>th</sup> grade context. For one, I am not sure I want to start the year off with showing a paper that has been redone multiple times. That might be a reality check for an 11<sup>th</sup> grade audience, but an 8<sup>th</sup> grade audience very well might despair at the thought! I want to set individual goals with students and help students reach those goals in writing by getting to know students wants and desires for their writing practice. In addition, I have tried to start out the year from a more collaborative place, because last year students struggled to come up with ideas on social justice writing on their own. I want students to see that the process is not going to be completely individual, and that help, brainstorming, and co-creating are natural parts of the writing process as well. If students need, the process can be more individual-oriented too, as differentiation will also be honored. In any case all students should feel safe in Christensen’s Read Around process, and that means a lot of flexibility with sharing on the front end to see the dynamics of the class. At the end of Day 1’s lesson, I would encourage students to share another student’s

writing that was shared with them, to both encourage listening to each other and to build confidence before sharing one's own writing. Perhaps a modification could be to have example sentences from social justice writing ready so if students are really feeling uncomfortable, they can share an anonymous writer's writing to help build more examples before choosing a topic. As Christensen writes, "It is not uncommon for students to push through a "blah draft" draft to "get it done," then when they hear their classmates' pieces, they find a new way to enter the essay to make it livelier," (126). By providing these opportunities for sharing and collaboration, students will be much better prepared to write their diagnostic essay this year.

No strong lesson would be complete without strong examples and visuals at the ready to help students get into the mindset of writing. Although I want students to guide the brainstorming to some degree, it will be important to give them an idea of what they can do, keeping in mind that they possibly have had prescriptive writing instruction in the past. In the context of our classroom, some examples we could use are those in *Teaching for Joy and Justice* (Christensen 133-140). After reading, it would be helpful to go through the see, feel, wonder process and assess the affects that powerful, unique writing has on students. This also helps to passively push students to achieve and foster an internal drive to do better (more in line with a growth mindset than what I was doing last year).

There is a lot of pressure to start off on the right foot. By careful co-planning with my co-teacher and utilizing Christensen's resources, I can do better to differentiate and make the writing process attainable for all students. For 8<sup>th</sup> graders who come with varying degrees of writing confidence, it is imperative to build them up before high school. It will also require passion and fire on my part, and I will also need to share my writing on this topic and show vulnerability. I need to demand excellence of both myself and my students, while continually questions what excellence actually means. Armed with the knowledge and more passionate mindset, I am ready.

#### Works Cited

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up, 2nd Edition*. Milwaukee, Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 2017.

Christensen, Linda. *Teaching for Joy and Justice*. Milwaukee, Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 2009.

