

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Writing for Real Audiences

At Malaga Cove Middle School, we are making history happen with our students. I call it "Project History-in-the-Making."

The California History/Social Science Framework calls for a greater use of primary source materials. We found an excellent way to involve students in meaningful writing of history. It all happened rather fortuitously when the seventeen students of the eighth-grade class of 1940 wrote a letter to the class of 1965. Subsequently the 272 students of the class of 1965 added a similar letter of their own for the class of 1990. What a wonderful opportunity for our students to get a rare glimpse into history through these primary source letters of twenty-five and fifty years ago! Now this graduating class is leaving its mark by composing a letter to the class of 2015. Future students will have a peek into seventy-five years of our history.

The lead articles from the *Los Angeles Times* and *Daily Breeze* depict a time not so long ago and yet historically important to the students, when life "seemed" less complicated. Then students are suddenly jarred by the fact that five of the seventeen 1940 grads who were Japanese Americans were in detention camps only eighteen months after the writing. It shocked our students and gave them a different perspective on the times.

After reading the letter, we issued invitations to both the 1940 and 1965 graduates, and what happened next can only be described as serendipity. Several graduates spent the day on the common ground they share with our students—the campus of Malaga Cove Middle School. They talked about their experiences as students and shared the camaraderie they had with one another. Our students interviewed them, asking about the good old days but also about the future—the future which will be the present for the graduates as of June. They related the experience as "suddenly coming upon a talking, walking time machine."

"What did you do after Malaga Cove?" was most frequently asked. "Where are you now?" "Are you satisfied?" "Do you have any regrets?" Straightforward questions answered candidly. Since each of the eighth-grade language-arts/social-

studies classes is responsible for a part of the 2015 letter, many asked the returning graduates what changes they had witnessed that were the most surprising.

These wonderful people who have lived most of their lives in our communities are truly a valuable resource. Why not get people like these together with students and start a history of your school and community? It certainly worked for us.

Kathy Allen, Malaga Cove Middle School, Palos Verdes Estates, California. This article originally appeared in English Journal, November 1990.

LETTER WRITER OF THE WEEK

For many parents a child's first day off to kindergarten brings feelings of both joy and panic; however, soon the parents and child adjust nicely and one wonders what all the fuss was about. Seven years later comes another nerve-wracking experience for parents. Their child leaves the friendly confines of the neighborhood elementary school and enters the terrible halls of the junior high!

In my seventh-grade English class I try to ease parental fears by keeping parents informed. Beginning with the first Friday of the school year, my class sends home a weekly letter to parents informing them of what is happening in our English class as well as of important happenings within the school.

I write the first few letters on our computer. By the third week of school, students themselves have been trained in the computer lab, and our weekly letter is written by a student. As a class, we briefly brainstorm assignments and events worthy of inclusion. Each student has the opportunity to compose at least one of the final letters to parents.

After the first quarter we add another dimension to our weekly letter. Each week the class features a classmate "in the spotlight." On Monday, that student gives a brief oral autobiography. He or she must prepare an outline for the presentation, and most students bring in pictures to place on the bulletin board, which is reserved for the person "in the spotlight." Using the outline mentioned above, the letter writer then includes a paragraph in the letter about that week's featured person.

Motivating Writing in Middle School

The student who writes the letter must have three people proofread it. One of these must be the person in the spotlight, to make sure the paragraph about that person is accurate. I then proofread the finished product (but do not assign a grade). After any final editing, I photocopy the letter and the letter writer distributes the copies to be taken home by the class.

Here are two sample paragraphs from letters my students have written:

Since we have been reading either biographies or autobiographies, we have been outlining our own life. Now we must get ready to be "in the spotlight." Reagan G. is going to be the first person. She is going to bring in pictures of herself, and she is orally going to give us a mini-autobiography on Monday.

On Wednesday we relaxed and read a short story called "Mr. Stang Picks Up the Pieces." It was a mystery. Now we must write our own mini-mysteries, which we will share with the class on Thursday. We will see if we are good detectives!

Obviously, there are several possible benefits from this activity. Parents appreciate knowing what's going on at school; students feel comfortable talking and writing about a familiar topic; and students enjoy the chance to use the computer, as well as the responsibility of composing letters for a real audience. In addition, I have the chance to teach or review outlining, oral communication, and letter-writing skills.

Alicia Cross, Hopkinton High School, Contoocook, New Hampshire

Is There Life after Basic Skills?

PUBLISHING A SCHOOL-WIDE ANTHOLOGY

What's in a name?" asked Shakespeare's Juliet. We might answer, "There's magic in a name," the magic of seeing your name in print. Not only your name, but your words, your thoughts, your paragraphs, your ideas. You're sharing something with people you don't even know. They're actually reading your thoughts. That's pretty heady stuff. Especially if you're a kid. Suddenly those meaningless, endless, mind-boggling worksheets on handwriting, capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, and subject-verb agreement have purpose. Suddenly you must communicate clearly, concisely, and accurately because you want to publish in a school-wide anthology.

The production of a student-written creative writing magazine proved to our students, who were suffering from the back-to-the-three-Rs overkill, that there really is life after basic skills. Here's what to do if you want to prove the same thing to your students.

First, select a staff of six to ten students, more if you have a creative writing class-club as I have. Ours is called "Imagination Station." Students chose to take this class instead of the usual eighth-grade English class. Therefore, I must teach the regular curriculum plus creative writing and produce the magazine. As a club we have officers with a staff organized like that of a magazine: an editor-in-chief and fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art editors.

To stimulate interest in your new project you could hold a school-wide contest to name your magazine. After entries are submitted, your staff votes on the winner which is announced as part of a publicity campaign.

It's important to inform other teachers and to solicit their help. A mimeographed note should inform teachers of the kinds of submissions you accept. We take poetry, short stories, essays, plays, one-liners, fables, short descriptions, and insights. We do not accept jokes, riddles, and cartoons. The note should also state your deadline. You will need an

ample three months between deadline and distribution. Our deadline is the first day of second semester. Save yourself a hassle by not accepting submissions after the deadline. Make a plea for enthusiastic support. After all, the magazine will give purpose and direction to everyone's writing program. Suggest that teachers have poetry, short story, and essay writing units before the deadline. Also attach a sample copy of a statement explaining what plagiarism is and providing space for students to verify (with a parent's signature) that the work being submitted is original. Students should staple a signed form to each submission. They will learn what plagiarism is and you are protected from plagiarized material—you hope.

As the submissions come in, put each into the appropriate file folder: fiction, nonfiction (essays, drama, etc.), and poetry. To judge the submissions, divide them among the class with the fiction, nonfiction, and poetry editors serving as group leaders. Have each group read its submissions aloud. The students rank them with number one for superior, number two for average, and number three for poor. The editor-in-chief reviews all rankings to check for accuracy and for obvious mark-ups or mark-downs. You do the same. In making the final choices, include as many different student authors as you possibly can. One thing that will affect this is the size of your paper. Because it makes for efficient use of space, we use letter-size pages, eight and one-half by eleven inches. Our 1980 magazine was sixty pages long, accommodating over 160 entries.

You need to scrounge the best typewriter your school can afford. Call this step the "Great Balancing Act," because it is the most tedious for you. Using a fresh, black carbon ribbon, type the selected submissions as they will appear on each page. In other words, you will do the layout and create camera-ready copy at the same time. These pages are the ones that will ultimately go to the printer. Leave spaces for pictures to be hand drawn later by the art editor and staff. Make each page look balanced. If you type two or three pages daily, the task will not be burdensome. This is why you need three months. Proofread carefully.

Keep the copy neat by placing these typed pages in a separate file folder labeled "Camera-Ready Copy" where they will not be smudged. Make two photocopies of each page you type. One copy goes to a teacher-friend or administrator for further proofreading, the other to your art editor. The art staff designs the covers and title page. For camera-ready copy, they may use

typing paper and black felt-tipped or ballpoint pens. Place the finished sheets in the "Camera-Ready Copy" folder.

The art staff now makes pencil drawings to fit the spaces you have left on each page. These drawings can be cut out and taped or pasted onto the photocopied pages given to the art editor. When everyone is satisfied, the drawings can be traced onto the original, camera-ready copy. Students trace lightly in pencil, then darken the penciled lines with black felt-tipped or ballpoint pens. Extra paper should be laid over the typed part of the pages to prevent smudging.

When all the camera-ready pages are in your file folder, check to see that the pages are numbered and in the right order. Has the copy been thoroughly proofread? Are cover pages satisfactory? Is the title page accurate and in place? After this final check, take the folder to different printers for price estimates. Do not overlook high school printing classes, your district printing department, or your own in-school photocopying machines. When you select a printer, collect color samples for the cover. Take these samples to your staff for them to choose. Tell the printer to use both sides of the paper. Also ask for saddle stapling so that the staples are placed in the fold in the middle of the book. Most printers will require two to four weeks to complete the printing.

After you determine the cost per copy, announce the day of distribution so students will come prepared with money. To sell ours, the English teachers had all their students write commercials. The best ones were taped on cassettes and played during the morning announcements. Not only did this involve many students, but it also provided a lesson in persuasion, composition, and speech techniques.

After distribution of the anthologies, teachers can now use student writing as a basis for teaching anything from capitalization and punctuation to irony and point-of-view. It's smart to keep a class set handy so teachers can borrow them next year to use in motivating potential contributors, especially those coming from feeder schools.

The purpose of the anthology is not to make skilled editors or grammarians out of kids. It won't. They will probably commit the same errors they always have. Yet they will see the relationship between that "dry, boring stuff" we call basic skills and the clean, beautiful discipline of standard English in their own creative work in their own creative magazine.

In short, there is life after basic skills.

Vivian Morgan Corll, Ramblewood Middle School, Coral Springs, Florida. This article originally appeared in English Journal, December 1981.

FAMILY LORE

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

In this assignment, students are asked to write down three family stories that they have heard repeated at important family events and around the dinner table. Students are encouraged to consult family members for details. They might also ask grandparents and older relatives for tales of their growing up. Immigration stories are especially apt. If any students are unable to remember or obtain family stories, they may write stories of their own childhoods that have been told to them or that they remember.

Before students start brainstorming for stories, I tell two of my family stories. One is about the immigration of my grandmother, when her boat sank in view of Ellis Island, and the second is the story of the elopement of my mother-in-law and father-in-law, who eloped when a death in the family threatened to delay their marriage for six months. After sharing my examples I go around the class to be sure each student is focused on the assignment.

Students have several days to talk to family members and write their stories. The day the written work is due, we have a class discussion. I ask students why they think some incidents are retold and the vast majority are discarded. Students offer ideas and usually come to the conclusion that families retell stories that somehow relate to what the family values.

Each student reads one selection to the class. During this time, each time I have done this, the class has become totally silent as everyone listened. In large classes, we have been able to identify diverse cultural and ethnic values. Each student decided what was an important family value and how it was or was not reflected in the family stories.

I often lead discussions about the literal truth of the stories, leading to the conclusion that the greater truth lies in the values preserved by the recounting of the stories, not in whether Grandma had \$10 or \$20 in her purse when her trunk went down with the ship. As a contemporary example I talk about the heroic air battles of Prince Andrew in the Falkland Islands which, though reported by the press, did not happen. This in turn leads our discussion to the importance of myths and legends. We find different values expressed by different cultures. If we want better understanding of an historical time or a foreign people, we should study their myths. Myths and legends are simply an extension of family stories.

On back-to-school night parents commented what a positive assignment it was and how it had generated long conversations with the students. Parents also said they appreciated that the school valued something they valued.

Several students reported that they, their parents, and their grandparents had enjoyed discussing family stories together.

I return to this assignment throughout the year when I teach heroes, social values found in literature, voice, and the role of the storyteller in society.

Sarellen Shlala, Summit High School, Summit, New Jersey

THE EXPERT EYE

When students first reach the stage of writing multi-paragraph essays, they usually need help in planning and organizing the presentation of their ideas. I designed the following writing assignment to give them flexibility in choosing a subject and also allow a similarity of format that would facilitate class instruction in the essay-writing process. In essence, students choose a person who possesses an observable skill they admire, observe the execution of the skill, write descriptions of what they observe, and then plan and carry out interviews to discover what *unobservable* thought processes, such as planning and judgment, underlie what they observed.

The instructions below constitute a three-page handout given to each student. Each step in the essay-writing process is explained. In a multistep assignment that takes almost two weeks to complete, students find this type of outline helpful. Students may confer with me as needed at any time during the process.

STUDENT HANDOUT

Did you ever admire or envy someone for his or her ability to do something expertly—swim the backstroke, create a beautiful clay pot, train a dog, or grill the perfect hamburger? The expert makes it look so easy! Perhaps experts see something during the creative process that we miss, or maybe they interpret what is seen in a special way. To learn a skill requires more than just watching and more than just following a set of directions. We must learn to see what the expert sees.

Motivating Writing in Middle School

Prewriting is a two-part assignment. In the first part, you will carefully observe someone performing a skill. Then, you will interview the person observed to discover the secrets of the skill that only the expert sees.

Select: First, decide on a person you can personally observe doing the skill you admire. You must choose someone whom you will be able to interview later. The easiest type of expertise, obviously, is one which involves observable actions that you can describe. Try to find a simple skill, or choose one observable part of a complex skill. For example, acting would be a difficult skill to examine, since most of what the actor does to prepare is mental or not seen in the final production. Your mother's Thanksgiving dinner may be admirable, but you would probably want to limit yourself to describing the preparation of one dish.

Observe and Note: Closely watch the person in action. If possible, try to observe the operation more than once during this week. Keep a log of your observations. If possible, try to observe without letting the person know, since self-consciousness might affect his or her performance and give you invalid observations.

Write: At the end of the week, write a vivid description of what you have observed. Be sure to use strong verbs and precise adjectives and adverbs so that your reader can visualize the subject in action.

Reflect: Now, reflect on what you have seen and written. What you have described was really only part of the process. Such crucial elements as an expert's planning, reasons for particular actions, and the expert's own assessment of his or her effectiveness are hidden from your senses. You may have inferred plans and thoughts, but to be sure, you must ask some good questions of your subject. You must arrange an interview.

Write: Write a short paragraph explaining what you hope to learn from the interview that you could not observe directly. This should come from your reflections and help you plan the interview.

Plan: Before the interview, formulate questions—at least ten. They should be designed to get answers that reveal how your subject sees his or her work. We will formulate some sample questions in class to help you with this step, but come prepared with some ideas of what kinds of questions bring answers to complement what you observed. Keep in mind that we aren't writing full biographies in this assignment!

Interview and Record: Now conduct the interview. Be punctual for your appointment. If possible, bring a tape recorder and ask for permission to record the interview. You may take notes, if necessary, but it may be hard to take notes and listen thoughtfully. That's your main job—to *listen*. Don't limit yourself to the prepared questions. Follow through with probing questions if the response fails to tell you what you want or if something is said that you don't understand or that you want to know more about.

Analyze: After the interview, compare the subject's comments with your own observations. What did the subject's reflections on his or her actions reveal? Did these reflections confirm what you had suspected? What surprised you?

Write: Write an informative and interesting analysis of what you learned in the interview. *Do not write out a verbatim transcript of the interview.* The focus is on your subject, so avoid first-person pronouns.

Finally, add two paragraphs to the three you have already written: (1) an introductory paragraph to introduce your subject and his or her area of expertise; and (2) a final paragraph to summarize what you learned about being an expert at this skill.

Your complete paper should contain the following: introduction, observation, purpose of interview, information from interview, and conclusion.

Suggested Timetable

1. Observations made and noted. Time: 1 week.
2. Observations written in rough draft form. Time: 1 day.
3. Appointment made for interview. Time: Schedule appointment within a few days after completing observations.
4. Plan and write down the interview questions. Have these checked by the teacher before you conduct the interview.
5. Interview completed. Time: Within 1 week after observations.
6. Rough draft of interview analysis and introductory and concluding paragraphs completed. Time: 1 day.
7. Rough draft revised and edited, with feedback from a classmate. Time: Class time for 2 weeks after assignment is given.
8. Final draft prepared. Time: 2 days after class time for conferences.

This project has been very successful with my advanced eighth-grade language arts students; students learn from the writing and interviewing practice and also gain insight into what it takes to be an expert at something.

Claudia Maynard, St. Petersburg, Florida

PROS AND CONS LEAD TO WRITING

It had been a long week and Friday had finally arrived. It was almost time to go home. My students were at their learning centers. I commented to one of my students how tired I was and that I didn't feel like cooking dinner that evening. Suddenly I heard one of the other students say, "Hector was bad today, that's why you're tired." Then another student said, "Joey was in trouble in P.E. today." The third comment was about how hot the day had been. On impulse, I went to the chalkboard and wrote "Why I should not cook dinner tonight." Beneath it, I wrote the word PRO, on the left, and CON, on the right. Then I wrote the comments the children had made under the appropriate column. I explained that we were going to think of all the reasons why I *should not* cook that evening, versus the reasons why I *should* cook that evening. I explained that "pro" meant "for" and "con" meant "against"—these would be suggestions *for* and suggestions *against* cooking that evening.

The students' responses were excellent. As I copied them onto the chalkboard, I asked the students to write everything I was writing on their papers. Our excitement was interrupted by the bell, but the excitement that this activity had created within the classroom was unbelievable. I couldn't let this activity stop there. I assigned the students to write a paper using all the information that had been generated during this spontaneous activity. Already I was eager for Monday to arrive so we could continue.

The homework that students brought back on Monday was fantastic. I explained to the children that the paper they had written was a persuasive essay. I was quickly interrupted by a hand waving high in the air. "Mrs. Garza, can the class help me write a persuasive essay? I want to convince my parents to make me a birthday party." Juan was truly excited about his request.

Other students echoed his request. "Yes, yes, let's do it!" I taped a large sheet of paper to the board and wrote "Why Juan should have a birthday party" along with all of the "pros" and "cons" my students suggested.

The students had found a purpose for their writing. Of course, they didn't realize that they were also practicing important skills such as capitalization, punctuation, sequencing, listing, categorizing, higher-order thinking skills, and oral communication. Best of all, students loved what they were doing and they couldn't stop writing. They were on their way to becoming great writers and readers.

By the way, the persuasive essay worked in both instances—I didn't cook dinner that evening and Juan had a wonderful birthday party.

Maria Elena Garza, David Burnett Elementary School, San Antonio, Texas

TEACHER INTERVIEWS

Here's an interview project with something for everyone. The student interviewers have a chance to find out more than they ever wanted to know about their favorite teachers, and the interviewed teachers have a captive audience for childhood reminiscences.

Each student first writes a letter requesting an appointment with a teacher whom he or she would like to interview. The interview is to be scheduled at the teacher's convenience.

Next, the student meets with the teacher in person to confirm the time of the interview appointment and to agree on general topics to be explored in the interview. This is just a brief meeting, but it lets the student know if there are any topics that the teacher would especially like to be asked about, such as a former career in mountain climbing or a famous relative in the family, and it provides ideas for questions. Questions prepared for an interview might pertain to the teacher's childhood, family

life, exciting or unusual experiences, world travels, interests and hobbies, past jobs, likes and dislikes as a teacher, views on important issues, and so on.

Once a student has prepared a list of about twenty questions, he or she practices the interview in front of the class, with a volunteer playing the role of the teacher. Students in the audience offer suggestions on how the interviewer could improve specific questions or interviewing techniques.

During the actual interview, the student takes notes to be used in writing a biographical sketch. (If an instant camera is available, the student can take a photograph at the time of the interview and include it in the finished biography. Otherwise, the teacher can be asked to provide a photograph for the completed project.) After the interview, the student prepares a rough draft of the biography by rewriting the notes in complete sentences and adding any details not recorded during the interview. I suggest that students try to make their biographies "flow" and not sound like lists of facts.

A draft of the biographical sketch is given to the teacher interviewed, not for editing or correction, but for confirmation that the information is presented accurately. The teacher jots comments, if any, on the rough draft and returns it to the student. This feedback helps students see if they have asked a question in a misleading way, failed to ask the complete question, or made an incorrect assumption.

In my class, two students interviewing a teacher jointly asked if he had any sisters but forgot to ask about brothers. Without realizing their oversight, the students stated in their draft that the teacher was an only child; they drew the conclusion that he probably got his own way often. When reviewing the draft, the teacher circled the pertinent question on the question list and the erroneous conclusion in the draft and responded in the margin, "False presumption. You never asked if I had brothers. I have two." The students also asked the teacher if he played on any school sports teams; when he said no, they concluded that he didn't participate in any school activities. The teacher wrote, "I was involved in other activities in school, but in the interview, we talked only about sports." In addition, either in initial notetaking or in rewriting notes, an "uncle" inadvertently changed to a "cousin," and a list of vacation spots visited took on an extra place-name, "Las Vegas," which, according to the interviewed teacher, "was never mentioned."

It can be valuable to discuss as a class the kinds of errors in accuracy found in students' drafts. Parallels can be drawn between the omissions and faulty deductions made by students and those made occasionally by reporters in the media.

After students correct any errors noted by the teachers interviewed, they

turn their written biographies in to me for comment. When I return the papers, students correct and rewrite them in final form, attach the photographs, and make covers using construction paper and felt-tip pens. I have found that the interviewed teachers are delighted to receive these decorated biographical sketches.

Susanne Joyce, Valley High School, Sanders, Arizona

WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT

Here's an assignment that provides a challenging way for students to develop and practice researching skills. My general instructions to students are as follows:

Visit several of your favorite hangouts: pizza parlors, ice cream shops, video arcades, ethnic restaurants, clothing stores, fast food joints, and so on. Interview customers, employees, and managers. Evaluate the service, decor, cleanliness, and the price and quality of the goods. Then decide whether you're going to rave about each place or pan it, and write reviews that tell "what's hot and what's not. "

This basic idea can be adapted for use as a two- or three-day individual assignment or as an expanded research and writing project. I make it a two-week group project, in which students in groups of four do their researching, discussing, writing, and revising together.

Students first meet in their groups to decide what favorite hangouts they want to visit and what aspects they want to review. I ask students in each group to choose several establishments of the same type, for instance, several ice cream shops, pizza parlors, or clothing stores, to provide a basis of comparison.

Though everyone is to note such aspects as general cleanliness and service, students are encouraged to develop an area of group expertise—a specific area that they research and evaluate in detail. Students in one group might focus on the differences among the ice creams served in three different ice cream shops; students in another group might evaluate the effect that three different restaurant decors have on the mood and comfort of the customers.

In the first group meeting, students write down and discuss what they already know about each place. Then, sometime in the next couple of days, they take their lists of things to look for and questions to ask and visit the selected spots, either singly or en masse.

After students visit and take notes on several establishments, they meet in their groups to evaluate and write up their findings. Students could be asked either to write individual reviews, in which case they could exchange drafts for peer editing, or to work together as a group to produce one cohesive expository essay. Either way, students should include general reviews of each place as well as detailed comparisons based on their area of expertise.

After the completed writings are shared with the class, they are compiled and printed in the form of a small booklet and given to the school counselors. The counselors, in turn, give our booklets to new students in town who would like to know "what's hot and what's not."

Dee Chadwick, Flagstaff High School, Flagstaff, Arizona

MAKING THE MOST OF TV

For better or for worse, high school students tend to be hearty consumers of television fare. Use the following activity to move students out of the role of spectator and into the more active role of analyst. I give students the following instructions:

You are to watch a TV program and to write a short paper on it. Choose a program that you haven't seen before or have seen only once or twice. Let family members know that this is an *assignment* so that they try not to disturb you while you are watching. During the program, take simple notes. Who are the main actors and actresses? What happens in the episode? What is your reaction to the program?

After the program is over, write down more detailed notes, everything that you can remember. Don't plan to watch another program right after the one you are reviewing because you will need time to write down your ideas while they are fresh in your mind. In your notes you should have answers to questions such as:

- What type of show is it? (comedy, drama, detective, medical, science fiction)
- Where and when is this show taking place?
- Are the characters believable? Are they intended to be?
- Could you understand the action clearly?
- Is the show violent? If so, do you think that the violence is necessary?
- What is your prediction for the success of the series? (Consider the time period, the shows that come on before and after, the shows on at the same time on other networks, the subject, the particular audience it appeals to.) If you already know the show to be a success, explain the factors that you believe are responsible.

Take down any additional information that you may want to work into your paper, such as comments or reactions from other members of your family who watched the program, what you have read about the program in the newspaper or *TV Guide*, or comments from friends.

Then write an outline and a rough draft. One possible outline follows:

1. The title of the series, the network, the local channel, and the general idea for the series.
2. Main actors and actresses and the roles they play.
3. What happened in the episode you watched? (plot summary)
4. How well did you like the program? What did you like about it? What didn't you like about it? Will you watch it again? Why or why not?
5. What is your prediction for the success of this series? How long do you think it will last? Give at least three reasons for your prediction.

In between writing your rough draft and your final version, read your paper to one or two other students for feedback. It would also be a good idea for you to watch more than one episode of the series before you write your final version. That way you will be more familiar with the characters and setting and will be more qualified to make a judgment.

Note: Double-space both your draft and your final version; that is, write or type on every other line to leave room for comments.

Peggy Hanson, Valley Junior High School, Grand Forks, North Dakota

A Prewriting Approach

WRITING AND EXPLORING VALUES

Many times our students are programmed to think they have nothing to write. "I don't know what to write. I don't have anything to say." Next time students agonize over the pangs of writing, smile instead of frowning. Tell them that before leaving your class they will have a topic for writing. The following questionnaire leads into an excellent prewriting session. (Remember they have to do the discovery.)

Values Questionnaire

Choose only one answer.

1. Which is the worst problem in society today?
 - a. drug dealers
 - b. drunk driving
 - c. air pollution
 - d. other _____

2. Which do you value most?
 - a. world peace
 - b. solutions to incurable diseases
 - c. your family
 - d. other _____

3. If you were President of the United States, which issues would you put at the top of your list of concerns?
 - a. nuclear power
 - b. environment
 - c. poverty
 - d. other _____

After students have time to share their answers in triads, bring them together as a class and ask for volunteers to share what happened in the group. (Tally answers if you wish.) Undoubtedly, some students will demand to speak their minds about one of the topics in the questionnaire. When this happens, I tell those students that they now have a topic for writing. The discovery comes from the students, and they feel as if they have come up with their own topics.

Sometimes we bring it a step further with role-playing. The students discover that their conversations can become supporting details for their drafts. The choice of an extensive or reflexive piece is up to the student.

Through group sharing and role-playing, students have brought their outside world to the classroom, and the classroom has helped them explore their values in daily life.

Dawn Martin, E. A. Olle Middle School, Alief, Texas