NOTES Plus

A Quarterly of Practical Teaching Ideas March1997

Ideas from the Classroom

Writing Assignment of the Month

Seeing Yourself As Others See You: A Low-Pressure Job Interview

This assignment is an elaboration of one originated by a former colleague, Claire Damon.

Each student in the 11- 12-grade writing class indicates whether he or she would like to be interviewed for a summer job or for college acceptance. Ideally, students describe the type of job (delivery, fast food, clerical, summer camp, etc.) or the college/university to which they intend to apply, so that the teacher may create thoughtful, appropriate questions.

The teacher interviews each student for 5-6 minutes in an area that is private and without distractions. The interview is videotaped. Students arrange to see their interview over the next week or so and then write a one-page statement of their impressions.

How did they feel about the interview?
Did they feel they answered the questions asked?
Did they appear comfortable?
How did they sit/move?
Did they look the teacher/interviewer in the eye?
Did anything in the interview surprise them?
Did they appear engaged/disinterested?
Did they forget to make important points? If so, do they see how/where they might have added them?

The students loved this assignment and were eager to go to the media center where they could arrange to see the tape privately. Their self-assessments were thoughtful and observant. They were grateful for the opportunity to see themselves in a nonthreatening situation and to have a chance to prepare for the real thing— an actual job interview.

I read and commented on (but did not grade) their assessments.

Alice Cross, Horace Greeley High School, Chappaqua, New York

Small Groups for Enlarged Understanding

In conjunction with the study of a story or novel, small-group work can be an effective way to enrich students' experience of their reading. Students are drawn into greater involvement and have a chance to compare impressions, share questions, and use their differing experiences to help one another understand characters and events.

One effective way I've found to use small groups with a reading assignment is to ask students to choose a title and task from the following list, each group member taking responsibility for one task. Students enjoy the novelty of having their own titles and, through the varied tasks they take on, we all end up with a richer experience of the reading.

By the time all the groups have completed their work and reported back to the class as a whole, we've listened to favorite portions being read aloud; viewed pertinent drawings and diagrams; learned of connections between the reading assignment and the world outside; heard questions students have about characters or events; listened to several different versions of the key points or highlights of the reading; heard lists of the most interesting words in the reading and their definitions; and followed several accounts of where things happen in the story and of setting changes that students feel are important.

Literary Luminary
Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that your group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text. You decide which passages or paragraphs are worth hearing, and then jot plans for how they should be shared. You can read passages aloud yourself, ask someone else to read them, or have people read them silently and then discuss. Remember to write down the beginning of the passage and include the page number. Plan to choose eight to ten quotations in all.

Illustrator
Your job is to draw some kind of picture related to the reading. It doesn't have to be great art—it can be a sketch, a cartoon, a diagram, a flow chart, a stick-figure scene, etc. You can draw a picture of a person, item, or event that's described in the reading; you can mix drawing and words if you want to. Any kind of drawing or graphic is okay. The only guidelines are that your drawing must relate to the story, should be based on some significant element or aspect rather than something totally trivial, and should try to offer some insight into what we read.

Connector
Your job is to find and explain connections between the reading assignment and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to your own life, to happenings at school or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, or to other people or problems that you are reminded of. You might also see connections between this story or book and other writings on the same topic or by the same author. There are no right answers here—whatever the reading connects you with is worth sharing! Plan to find and explain at least four or five connections.

Director
Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about the current reading. Don't worry about the small details: your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and to share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read, which you can write down during or after your reading. For instance, if while you are reading you find yourself surprised at a particular character's action, you might jot that down and later turn that into a question: "What do you think made this particular character do this?" Your assignment is to write down and ask ten questions which are specific and significant in some way. (That is, you may ask why someone did something or what they might have

been thinking, but don't ask a trivial question like "What color was X's jacket?" or "What was X's middle name?') Include a page number reference for each question.

Summarizer
Your job is to prepare a brief summary of the reading. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give a concise (one- to two-minute) statement that conveys the key points, the main highlights, the essence of today's reading assignment. It's a good idea to make a list of main ideas or events during or after reading and then review the list to see what you think is worth including. This shouldn't be a "daytime drama" style summary that includes every little detail—you will need to use your judgment on what parts of the reading to include and what parts to gloss over.

Vocabulary Enricher
Your job is to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in today's reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them while you are reading and then later jot down their definition, either from a dictionary or some other source. You may also run across familiar words that stand out somehow in the reading—words that are repeated a lot, used in an unusual way, or that seem key to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words too, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your group meets, help members find and discuss these words. Have definitions and page numbers for each word ready.

Travel Tracer
(This task is most appropriate with stories or books with complicated and varied settings. It can also be adapted for use with works in which a story line follows multiple characters and multiple time lines, or intertwines the stories of different characters—the student "Character Tracer" can help keep track of characters' relationships and of time lines.)

When you are reading a story or book where characters move around a lot and the scene changes frequently, it is important for everyone in the group to know where things are happening and how the setting may have changed. That's your job: to track carefully where the action takes place in this text. Make notes and record page numbers while you review the text so that you can describe each setting in detail to your group, either in words or with an action map or diagram.

When students become involved in these varied aspects of our reading, both meaning and interest are added to our class discussions of literature.

Margaret Mortenson, Orem, Utah

Word Commercials

I had a dilemma. How was I supposed to meet my department's requirements to teach weekly vocabulary lessons when it conflicted with my own philosophies? I knew that students needed to be actively involved in creating word meanings, thinking about word relationships, making up questions about them, and comparing them to new words. Completing exercises in the vocabulary book and taking a quiz on Friday were not going to help these students increase their vocabulary.

Instead, I tried to create projects and activities that motivated the students to actively work with and think about these words. The following lesson is an example of how I fulfilled the department's requirement and satisfied my need for creating meaningful vocabulary instruction.

Assignment
Meet in groups of four and create a commercial with this week's vocabulary words that advertises an original product.

Requirements:
1. The product must be an original creation.
2. Each group must use all of the vocabulary words.
3. The commercial must be at least one minute in length.
4. Each group must turn in a written script (in ink or typed) the day of the presentation.
5. Everyone in the group must participate during the commercial presentation.
6. The words must be shown or highlighted in some way during the commercial.
7. At the end of the commercial, each group must explain each of the words and how they were used.

The students spent three days preparing the commercials and presented them on the fourth day. They then took the quiz on Friday. I created guide sheets for the groups to use during each day on which they could record their ideas, plans, and work assignments for each group member. These sheets helped give them a focus to collect their ideas.

The students had quite a bit of fun creating everything from the practical "seater heaters" to the absurd "environment-friendly popcorn insulation." However, the most important part of the project was the amount of time students spent thinking about the words, how to use them, and how they related to words they already knew. Another benefit was that it gave students an opportunity to practice their speaking and presentation skills.

Analyn K. McKenzie, Pentwater High School, Pentwater, Michigan

Inkblots and Insights

For students to show that they truly understand a particular character in a story or novel we're reading, I ask them to give that character an inkblot test. First, we spend a little time talking about how an inkblot test is administered and what it is supposed to reveal. I show the class sample inkblots (see below) that originated with a game. (Unfortunately, I don't remember which game.) Then we have fun experimenting with making inkblots using food coloring or water-soluble inks.

For the assignment, the students may make random inkblots or try to create custom designs to "fit" the situation of the novel. Students may even use existing inkblots if they are able to find examples in books. Once the students have created or located inkblots, they are to set up a hypothetical psychologist's report and "analyze" their client's responses to the inkblot test. The client's responses should show insight into the character's mind. What, for example, might Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations* see in a series of blots? How might she respond? What would the "doctor's" advice be?

In first-person narratives, students respond first as patient (character) and then as doctor. As a variation to the assignment, you might have the student present the same series of blots to two different characters and thus show the different personalities through each interpretation.

Patricia M. Ward, Randolph Junior and Senior High School, Randolph, Massachusetts

Promoting Real Summer Reading

Of course we want our students to read over the summer, but I've yet to be convinced that the typical summer reading assignment does much to extend love of reading or increase literary competence. There may be a handful of students who can't wait to tackle our scintillating
assignments on their summer vacation, but for the most part, summer reading assignments are regarded as a plague and a pox, even by avid readers, who much prefer choosing their own books. Why don't we devote some time during the last couple of weeks of school to promoting real summer reading? Not mandating or requiring or assigning but encouraging it. Here are a few ways I've tried and some others I'd like to try:

- preparing and distributing student-written brochures on summer reading. My students did one on "Beach Books," which they defined as "books you can read with one eye while the other is peeled for promenading pulchritude" (either masculine or feminine).
- doing summer reading promos and reviews on morning announcements
- lending books from class libraries over the summer
- having a book fair at the end of the school year

- putting together a summer reading order form with the help of a local bookstore, and having books delivered the last week of school
- starting a summer reading program at the school
- giving books as prizes/rewards at end-of-school ceremonies
- making giant promotional posters for good books and posting them all over the school
- putting summer reading suggestions on the school's Web site
- arranging a book swap on the last day of school
- presenting book talks in all classes
- distributing annotated, specialized reading lists—e.g., nonfiction, science fiction, WW II, etc., based on surveys of students' interests
- publishing teachers' own personal recommendations for summer reading
- compiling a list of good audio books for car trips and other travel

I'm confident we could extend this list almost indefinitely, as well as come up with some great ideas for sharing summer discoveries when school is back in session. Students will be eternally grateful for a change from the status quo, and they might even read more, with greater understanding and satisfaction.

Gloria Pipkin, Mowat Middle School, Lynn Haven, Florida

An Advertiser's Avenue: Learning the Value of Diction

Nursing my love for advertising, and noticing my students' difficulty in incorporating captivating diction into their writing, I designed an assignment that satisfied the both of us.

Each student was asked to select an advertisement from a popular periodical. Because the publishing industry provides a vast repertoire of literature for teens, few, if any, students were unable to find an advertisement that personally engaged them. At the beginning of class I briefly explained the assignment and its purpose: learning to incorporate "good" diction to enhance and elevate their writing. Students were asked to evaluate and constructively criticize the advertisement, specifically the advertisement's diction and the effectiveness of the chosen diction. To facilitate the task, they were encouraged to draw boxes around "choice" words. Then each student was responsible for writing a single-paragraph rationale wherein they justified their critique. Prompts such as "What can you tell us about the advertiser's intended audience based upon diction?" were provided.

During the succeeding class session, students were divided into small groups based upon the topic of their advertisement—athletic shoes, personal hygiene, motor vehicles, and so on—and encouraged to share their "discoveries." Group discussion was facilitated by a peer evaluation sheet (see figure at right) which targeted such areas as "vivid word choices" and "varied word choices" and advertiser's liberal use or abuse of "grammar,"

"punctuation," and/or "mechanics." Part of the critique involves assessing whether the conscious use of sentence fragments that often appear in ads is appropriate and effective.

Because the group's evaluation of each individual group member's critique focused upon the advertisement, the fear of failing the assignment was removed, thereby allowing students to focus on learning versus appearances. In addition, they learned that they, too, can persuade and elicit certain emotions with their chosen diction, which ultimately establishes the tone and mood of their writing. Discussion here might focus on the use of cliches, when they occur, and on the ethics as well as the effectiveness of emotional appeals in choices of words and images.

Student's Name: _____

PEER EVALUATION SHEET

	Poor					Excellent
Controlling Idea						
Single Topic	1	2	3	4	5	6
Clear Point of View	1	2	3	4	5	6
Diction						
Vivid Word Choices	1	2	3	4	5	6
Varied Word Choices	1	2	3	4	5	6
Appropriate for Intended Audience	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conveys Consistent Tone	1	2	3	4	5	6
Technical Matters						
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	6
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mechanics	1	2	3	4	5	6

Additional Comments:

_____

_____

_____

Group Members: _____

_____

_____

_____

Tiffany Andrus, St. George, Utah

Advice for Teaching Mainstreamed ESL Students

The following question and response are reprinted from NCTE-talk, the electronic discussion group administered by NCTE.

I was just informed that a non-English speaking student will be joining my last period language arts block. This student will be with an ESL teacher at our central office for the first two periods and then will be bussed to our school where he will be in regular classes. This 14-year-old student appears to have no English skills, and I have no training teaching ESL. I'd like to try to make the best of the situation and help the student as much as I can. Can anybody offer suggestions?

Andy Martincak
Marcinaka@TEN-NASH.TEN.K12@TN.US

Here's my advice for teaching mainstreamed ESL kids:

1. Use lots of visual reinforcement. Write and draw on the blackboard, use actual objects (realia) when appropriate, be animated, use gestures, point at things, etc.

2. Use repetition. Common classroom vocabulary and procedures should become second-nature to your students from mere repetition. Also keep repetition in mind for key content vocabulary. Being consistent in terminology also helps.

3. Vary your speed. Slow down sometimes. Don't always talk so fast. I know that sometimes I catch myself talking faster in the classroom than I do in normal conversation because I am trying to get through things more quickly. It may also be a result of nervousness sometimes. Two of my ESL kids in my regular 9th grade English class last year had to remind me when I slipped into this habit.

4. Involve students. It is not only easier for your ESL students to comprehend when they are involved in hands-on work and cooperative group work, but they also learn the language faster.

5. Use eye contact. Try to keep students with you and be sensitive to body language that sends the message that you have lost them. (This is sometimes difficult to detect, however, and there are also cultural variables here.)

6. Make all students comfortable. The biggest need of adolescents is to fit in. If they are comfortable socially, academic and language skills will get more use and support.

7. Don't let students vegetate. It is tempting to just excuse ESL students from activities and assignments that we see are too difficult for them. I support adapting or differentiating assignments, but don't let them just sit out.

8. When students start to seem more fluent, realize that conversational fluency comes much sooner than their academic language proficiency. I've heard teachers complain that kids that now speak the language are just "pretending" not to understand in order to get special concessions. While this may be true in some cases, we need to keep in mind that basic interpersonal communication fluency normally comes in two to three years (sometimes faster) whereas academic linguistic proficiency can take anywhere between five to ten years. Learning a new language proficiently takes time. Don't assume fluency.

9. Use a buddy system. If you have two ESL students that speak the same language, you can pair them up on occasion to help each other. However, you need to monitor this closely. Sometimes you want students to be explaining things to each other and helping each other in their native language, and other times it may be counterproductive.

Please note that most of the above techniques not only help your ESL student to cope but will probably enhance various learning styles among your native English-speaking kids as well.

Lind Williams
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Writing Assignment of the Month

Reading through Writing through *Rashomon:* A Re-viewpointing Strategy

As an avid reader and writer, I've often found myself retelling and rewriting stories, articles, and news pieces, either aloud or on paper. In fact, I often "re-viewpoint" stories—that is, tell or write a story from a different narrative viewpoint. I recognize the appeal not only as a reader and writer, but as an audience member, of retelling the same story in the same sequence from varied perspectives.

The usefulness of this device is not limited to the print medium. Film directors such as Akira Kirosawa, director of the foreign film classic *Rashomon,* recognized the appeal for a viewing audience of experiencing the same story told and retold from various narrative perspectives. The Edward Zanuch film *Courage Under Fire* also uses this technique in telling its story of a downed woman helicopter pilot from the various perspectives of the soldiers who served under her command and of the rescue crew who picked her up.

Clearly this technique, which I call the *Rashomon* approach, is useful to sophisticated adult readers, writers, storytellers, film directors, screenwriters, and film audiences. But what use does it have in nurturing middle and secondary students of language arts? How can it be used to promote lifelong literacy?

Rashomon and "The Rocket Man"

My answer was to begin with a story my inner-city seventh graders had already studied as a class, "The Rocket Man" from Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man* collection. The story chronicles several days of leave time that a work-obsessed father spends with his family before he returns to his job. Soon after his visit, he dies as a result of an accident on the job. The story is told from the young son Doug's perspective.

I shared with students director Kirosawa's technique of telling and retelling the same narrative from the perspectives of different individuals. Then I challenged the students by asking what other story characters' or "out-of-story" characters' perspectives they could generate. The students were quickly able to identify other possible perspectives and other characters from "Rocket Man" who could serve as "tellers" of the story. They identified Lilly, the mother character, and the "Rocket Man" father himself. They also suggested the perspectives of guests at the Malibu hotel where the family stayed during the leave and the messenger who brought the news of the father's death, plus characters not mentioned in the story: Lilly's close friends, Doug's best friend, the father's boss, and fellow Rocket Men.

Next, the students were challenged to rewrite, retell, and/or reperform the original Bradbury "Rocket Man" story in a *Rashomon* style. Although the number of specific retellings of the narrative was not specified, at least three different perspectives were required. The students were given a week to work individually or in teams on their project.

When the time came for them to present, students were excited and eager to share their work. I was impressed not only by their writings but by the critical reading skills and deeply felt performances of the writings that had evolved. Here are some examples:

- Students presented a three-scene, three-character monologue with Lilly, the mother, holding a handkerchief as she shared the feelings of impending tragedy she felt during their vacation; the father speaking after his own death, sharing his pain as he explained his love of the rocket adventures which prevented him from staying with his family; and Doug, the son, two years after his dad's death, telling how he felt drawn to the same rocket travel career his dad had been involved in.

- One team presented a "Rocket Man" screenplay which suggested several possible settings, including the family home, the rocket itself, California, Malibu, Doug's school, a movie theater, rocket command, and the message center. The story would be shot detailing the impact each of these sites would have on participants.

- One student brought in an "off-camera character," the father's boss, to talk about the father's dedication as a Rocket Man, and paired him with the messenger who brought the son the news of his father's death.

Among other formats used for the assignment were character diaries, letters between various characters, stream-of-consciousness monologues, screen treatments, and triptych displays of three different character perspectives.

Extending the Rashomon *Approach*

It was obvious that this strategy supported student engagement, excitement, and active multiple-literacy creativity. Based on the initial field testing of this strategy with four classes, I decided to include it in a list of "independent book-reviewing options" that I provide as a way for students to share their independent readings with peers. The *Rashomon* approach quickly became a favorite.

Colleagues of mine from two inner-city high schools have also tried this approach with their tenth- and eleventh-grade classes and have found it to be very successful. In one innovative treatment, students used scenes from published plays found in Lorraine Cohen's *Scenes for Young Actors* to retell in dramatic format the same play plotline from another perspective.

In a similar vein, one of my students who loved Amy Tan's fiction found *The Joy Luck Club* perfect for a *Rashomon* approach. Since the book's point of view is from the mothers' and daughters' perspectives, the student decided to add in chapters for two of the daughters' husbands and one father. As the student pointed out, it was easy enough from the text as written to pick out dialogue, feelings, and actions for the men. The student sent her "male part" of *The Joy Luck Club* to Tan care of her publisher. She even wrote to the author about it as a follow-up activity.

I was pleasantly surprised when a ninth grader in an after-school writers' group presented me with three retellings of Dwight Okita's "In Response to Executive Order 9066: All Americans of Japanese Descent Must Report to Relocation Centers." (The poem is included in *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing.*)

The poem is told through letter format by a 14-yearold Japanese American child who is being sent to an internment camp in California during World War II. The student rewrote the poem as it might have been cast through the perspectives of the Irish American girlfriend, Denise O'Connor, the child's Japanese American father, and the public school teacher who was aware that her Japanese American students would be forced to leave their homes.

Here is the student's version of the poem from Denise's point of view:

Dear Sirs,
of course my best friend went
and I had to be
mean
Because you say she may
be giving secrets away
But when the first tomato
ripens
I'll miss her

Students Propose a Follow-Up
Although I had not anticipated transferring this approach to a news story, my middle school students asked if they could also use the *Rashomon* approach with articles, features, and editorial comments from the Jessica Dubroff story. Jessica Dubroff was the seven-year-old pilot who died tragically with her father and instructor in pursuit of a flight record.

The viewpoints that students considered included those of Jessica's mother and brother, Jessica's uncle, reporters who spoke with the mother, columnists who wrote about Jessica, Jessica herself, the flight instructor, and the flight instructor's bereaved relatives (omitted from the majority of news reports).

As I listened to a team of students in discussion, I was struck by how easily students were reading into and reflecting on actual perspectives and viewpoints inherent in this complex, compelling tragedy. Students were actively, reflectively, and critically engaged in text analysis, synthesis, and retelling. Their pride in identifying different possible viewpoints associated with news items also suggested ways in which the strategy could promote informed critical citizenship and lifelong literacy.

Rose Reissman, Community School District #1, Brooklyn, New York

Motivator of the Month

A Writing-on-the-Job Presentation

In this project, my eighth-grade English class planned and presented a workshop in which adults with various occupations talked about the type of education and the communication skills required on their jobs. The eighth graders invited sixth and seventh graders to the presentation as well.

The project involved students in the following tasks, in addition to the tasks of specific committees.

- project planning
- business letter writing
- writing questions
- writing thank-you letters

Introduction

I spend one class period introducing this project. I begin by asking students to write in their journal several jobs that they might be interested in having as an adult. As a class we share ideas and I list them on an overhead projector. After we have identified a significant number of occupations, I ask students to consider which occupations might require writing skills, and in what way. As we bring up the various routines and activities

of different jobs, students begin to see that people in many different jobs need good writing skills. At this point, I introduce the concept of having a panel discussion on jobs and job skills, involving community members from a wide range of occupations.

Project Planning

Project planning involves students in the following tasks:

- Students identify the tasks needed to accomplish the project.
- Students organize the tasks into committees.
- Students assign tasks and due dates.
- Students select a chairperson for committee reports.
- Students monitor progress and report to the class.

I begin by asking students to list ten to twelve tasks that would be required to present this panel discussion. We brainstorm and then compile one long list on the overhead projector, typically listing such tasks as *finding the people for the panel, writing letters, making lists of questions, rearranging the room for the presentation,* and so on. This is the preliminary plan. Then I ask the students to group these tasks into logical committees and to decide how many people would be needed to do the work of each committee. The committees that my students came up with were *Interviewing, Room Set-Up, Welcoming, and Photography/Video.* Different groups of students may come up with different committee titles, but the tasks and division of labor will probably bear some similarity to these. At the end of the period, I ask all students to choose a committee to join. If some committees are more popular than others, a random system such as drawing names out of a hat can be used to determine the final roster for these committees.

Committees meet several times a week during class. Each group produces a list of tasks for their committee and assigns responsibilities and due dates. Each week, the chairperson reports to the class on the progress of that group. The following is a draft of a possible committee task list:

Interviewing—brainstorm questions to ask the participants; create a final list of questions; ask questions and take notes during the presentation

Room Set-Up—plan where the presentation will be held; plan where students and participants will sit; arrange for extra chairs and other details; check the site before the presentation; rearrange and clean the site after the presentation

Welcoming—find out information about the participant; introduce the participants during the presentation; make opening and closing remarks on the day of the presentation

Photography/Video—take photographs or videotape the presentation

Business Letter Writing

As part of this project, the whole class participates in writing business letters. Before I begin introducing the format of the business letter, we use the list of occupations created earlier to identify potential candidates for our panel discussion. Parents, teachers, and friends are helpful in obtaining potential candidates' names and addresses. (In my class, we chose a total of about twenty candidates and ended up with about ten participants.)

Then we review the business letter format and I list on the overhead transparency the key information that should be contained in each letter. For homework, each student is asked to draft one letter to a candidate extending an invitation to be part of our presentation. Over the next several class periods, we review, edit, and revise these business letters. Each student submits one final letter for evaluation.

The number of letters to be mailed will depend partly on which occupations interest students more, on whether all letters meet the standards determined by the students and teacher, and on how much class time will be available for presentations. If necessary, one option for reducing the number of in-class speakers is to ask some participants to visit the class in person and others to send letters to the class describing their jobs and the writing component of their jobs.

I allow approximately three to four weeks from the letter writing to the scheduled panel presentation.

Writing Questions

To allow the Interviewing Committee a head start and to give everyone experience in writing questions, I ask all students to sign up for one prospective participant and to draft ten to twelve questions about that person's occupation and about the writing skills required. Questions may also touch on the training and education required. A sign-up sheet written on the chalkboard or passed around the room can ensure that students are more or less evenly divided among the participants.

After initial brainstorming, students form groups based on the person they chose, review their questions, eliminate duplications among their lists, and assemble their lists into one main list of questions. This list is turned over to the Interviewing Committee, which reviews all the lists, revises questions, writes additional questions as needed, and practices asking questions in mock interviews.

Introductions

Students on the Welcoming Committee are responsible for researching and preparing the introductions for panel participants. They develop a short questionnaire for the participant as a group, write individual letters confirming the participation of each person, and ask participants for some basic bibliographic information for the introduction. From this information, they write the introduction for each individual on the panel. I ask that they meet the participants at the office, introduce themselves, and bring the participants personally to the site of the presentation. Prior to the start of the presentation, students review the planned introduction with the individual to ensure correctness. The Welcoming Committee is also asked to appoint one group member to make the welcoming and closing remarks for the assembly.

Room and Equipment Preparation
The Room Set-Up Committee is responsible for planning the room layout and arranging such details as clearing off a table for the speakers, providing chairs, providing a pitcher of water and paper cups for the participants, and so on. Prior to the day of the presentation, members of the Room Set-Up Committee brief the class on how the room will be set up. On the day before the presentation, we have a walk-through to practice introductions, interview questions, and the welcoming and closing remarks.

Depending on the equipment available, students on the Photography/Video Committee can arrange to take photographs or videotape the presentation. Photographs can be captioned by committee members and submitted to a school newspaper or arranged in a classroom display. A videotape can be shown to students after the presentation for their review and comments, as well as being made available to other classes for viewing.

On the scheduled day, students should be able to complete all the steps necessary for the presentation without teacher intervention. This includes setting up the facility, welcoming participants, making introductions, interviewing participants, offering concluding remarks, cleaning up the facility, and writing thank-you letters.

Thank-You Letters
All students write at least one thank-you letter to a participant. We review the general requirements for a thank-you letter in class and then discuss the possible items that should be included. Each student is required to draft one thank-you letter for homework. (We make sure everyone on the list is included.) On the following day, we review, edit, and revise, and prepare our letters for mailing to the participants.

Assessment
After the presentation, students evaluate it based on their own group and individual performance and assign a grade for themselves and their group. This grade is reviewed and negotiated with the teacher before a final grade is assigned for each group. I also give individual grades for the business letter and thank-you letter.

This project took about six weeks for my students to complete. We spent one week at the beginning on project planning and business letters. After that, we worked on the project about one day a week. The final presentation, which lasted about 75 minutes, was very successful for us. Although the original idea was to show students that writing skills were required in the real world, my students received so much more. We had a diverse range of professions represented—including several lawyers, a microbiologist, a computer scientist, a nurse, a police officer, a principal, and an accountant—and students were amazed at the variety of communication skills required in all these occupations. Participants were enthusiastic and encouraged students to do their best in school, to go to college, and to read as much as possible. Afterwards, we received several letters from participants congratulating the students on the great job they did.

Kathleen Wakabayashi, St. Patrick's School, San Diego, California

Literature Doesn't Kiss on the First Date

How often have we heard, "Oh, we read this story/poem! book last year," or "Mr. Jones read this to us"? Have we responded with disappointment that another piece of literature has been presented at a lower grade level? Or have we appropriately responded with "That's wonderful! But you know, literature doesn't kiss on the first date!"?

My most recent attempt at handling this situation was to have the year's first writing project one in which the students were required to reread a book.

First I challenged students to think and talk for a few minutes about the statement, "Literature doesn't kiss on the first date." After a lively class discussion, some students found themselves in agreement with, and many more were intrigued by, the idea that a story or book might have more to offer than one "date," or one reading would reveal.

I participated with students as we brainstormed the titles of books that we would like to "date" again and suggested ideas as to why we would like to revisit these books. Then students selected books to reread. Our list ended up including books read as previous class assignments, books borrowed from friends over the summer vacation, and even children's books read aloud to students several years before by parents or older siblings.

No restrictions were placed on the selections except that the student must have previously read the book or have had it read to him or her; that the book must be one that the student wanted to reread; and that the book must be available.

Before students began to reread their books, I distributed 5" x 8" index cards. I asked that they think a little about their selections and each make a small poster illustrating some aspect of the book that they remembered. These posters were to be completed before the rereading began, and were due within four or five days. The book's title, the author's name, and the student's name were required to be displayed on the poster.

After the second "date" with the book, for which students had two weeks, the students planned a paper discussing and comparing their first and second readings. Students had two weeks to work on the paper, spending some time at home and some time in class, and then were asked to convert their papers into speeches to be delivered to their classmates. The students received evaluations on the poster, the paper, and the speech.

Here are sample guidelines I gave my students to help them get started on their papers.

Suggestions for Your Paper

Discuss the situation in which you first "dated" this book. Was it read to you, or did you read it? If it was read to you, who was the reader? Under what circumstances was it read? In school? Did Mom or Dad or a babysitter read it to you while you snuggled under the covers "seldom getting beyond page four"? (Chris W.)

Was the book read to complete a school assignment? What memories do you have of this first reading? Were there ideas or events that you didn't understand? Was the vocabulary beyond your reach? Do you remember how you selected the book? Did you buy it at a store, find it in your parents' bookcase, or borrow it from a friend or neighbor? Did someone suggest that you read it?

"Mrs. Nunn assigned our third-grade class to read *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan. Since it was a required book, I expected it to be boring. Instead, I found Sarah's story compelling." (Carry M.)

Write about the understandings that you gained on the second date. For example, do you now have a feel for the theme? Is the characterization clearer? Talk a little about the vocabulary. Did you enjoy this date with your book? Why or why not?

"When I first read *Molly with the Slow Teeth* by Pat Ross, I misunderstood a few parts. Molly colored her front tooth black, so it looked like it wasn't there. On the first date, I wondered why she wanted black teeth. On the second reading, I learned that Molly wanted to fit in by pretending that her tooth was missing." (Christine H.)

"As I read the novel a second time, I realized that I had forgotten much of the book. Not only the scenes, but certain feelings came back to me as I read Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.* I sympathize with certain characters and understand their actions more than I could in fourth grade." (Cristy C.)

The final segment of this project was the students' delivery of speeches based on the paper. The students converted their papers to notes to which they could refer during the presentation. The speech was limited to five minutes, including the reading of an excerpt.

From Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* to P.D. Eastman's *Are You My Mother?*, the books dated for the second time ran the gamut of reading levels. Literature may not kiss on the first date, but many warm embraces occurred on the second.

Margaret Clark, Valley View Middle School, Watchung, New Jersey

Excerpts from NCTE-talk

Bulletin Boards as Genuine Teaching Tools

Too often bulletin board materials (especially commercially marketed ones) are penny-bright displays that lend a strained sense of cheer to the classroom environment. But a recent exchange of comments excerpted from NCTE-talk, the Council's electronic discussion group for teachers, demonstrates that bulletin boards can be used inventively as teaching tools. The ideas below, sparked by a query from a single teacher, show that bulletin boards can be thoughtfully integrated with literature and writing; that they can involve students in productive collaboration; that they can promote the sense of the

classroom as a literacy community and can even reach into the larger community, capturing the interests of parents, and in one case finding a place in a local museum.

Last week I entered my room and faced three empty bulletin boards. How about an idea exchange here? What was your best bulletin board idea? I'll start with one of my own and hope the rest of you will jump in.

Last summer I was doing a lot of quilting, and my mind kept thinking all the different authors in American literature and how they are all like the pieces of a big, old quilt. So I decided to make a mini-quilt of American authors. I used the crazy quilt pattern (all the squares are different shapes & sizes). I tried to match the fabric to a characteristic of the author. For example, I put Puritan authors on drab beiges and blacks, revolutionary authors on red, white, and blue, romantic authors on rich florals, etc. Then I wrote the author's name on the patch with fabric paint. The heading for the bulletin board was American Literature: A Patchwork Quilt. One of my colleagues suggested that, for an essay idea at the end of the course I have students pick five different authors and explain the author's connection to the color and fabric choice. Students could even do something like this as a project.

So jump in with all your ideas!
Sandy Hoffner
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The first unit I do at the beginning of the year is on Heroes. At the very beginning of the year, I post various articles and editorials on the topic of heroism. I have my students write a formal letter to the person they feel is a modern day hero and explain their reasoning. At the end of the letter, they request a response, a picture, postcard, etc., to share with the class. These are posted on the bulletin board throughout the semester. We get same interesting responses and the students love to see and read the bulletin board. I usually keep it up all semester because some responses take time to arrive.

Stacie Valdez
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I have been having a lot of fun with bulletin boards. I am teaching in a Hutterite Colony and I have 14 students from kindergarten to grade 8. I am concentrating on a lot of "getting to know you" activities and cooperative learning. With the students in grades 1 to 8, I divided them into two, multi-age groups. I provided them with a variety of bulletin board idea books and then we discussed the concept of "theme" and explored a few examples. Then they were given the following assignment:

1. Brainstorm possible themes for your bulletin board.
2. Choose one theme.
3. Make a list of the words and pictures that you want to include.
4. Draw a rough sketch of what the finished board will look like.
5. Draw up a list of needed supplies.

One group chose a Desert Island Theme and the other chose a Native American Village. They have done a wonderful job and have included part of the outdoors (tree branches and ferns to make trees and a forest; a twig to act as a fishing pole with a piece of yarn as the line; multicolored petals that when combined with twigs looked just like a campfire). They are having a ball and working together fantastically! I don't care that the themes they chose are ones we may not be studying. They are learning to work together and demonstrating what they already know as well as learning new techniques in representing things in this manner.

Linda Vich
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For two years I had students do a project similar to the quilt project. They created an American literature quilt, and it has been displayed at a local museum as well as at school. Having access to great computer equipment, we were able to scan images from many art books. From these scanned images, printed on a color printer, students created their own quilt squares. They were also responsible for a text square. They chose a favorite or otherwise significant passage from literature read during the year. First, they typed the text and saved it on computer; second, they chose a font that was appropriate to the work or time period; third, they printed using the laser printer and colored paper. When 120+ squares were put together on the wall, the effect was awe-inspiring. Finally, students had to write a paper explaining why they chose the piece of literature, why they chose the images, and what their intended effect wee. The second year, students also chose appropriate American music and explained how they would represent their squares in a video—one which never was made due to time constraints.

Many of the students decided that the "quilt" should not be broken up, so they donated their squares to me (with some beautiful dedications on the reverse side). Now I put it up every year. It always looks a bit different since the squares are never arranged the same way. New students and parents love it. And the local museum keeps asking for another showing with additional squares.

Unfortunately, the project took a lot of time. There is only one scanner and color photocopies are expensive. This past spring I didn't use this project. but I think I'll do it again this year.

Katherine Steinbring
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Why do teachers feel responsible for filling the bulletin boards? I have always left many holes and pointed to them on the first day and told the students they will be filling those gaping holes with their work. They have always responded appropriately and with class.

Ted Nellen
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Bulletin boards: The key words I was taught were “student work.” Even in high school, I think student work is what should be on your bulletin boards. Personally, for back to school, I have the students interview each other in pairs I choose and then write a mini--newspaper (with masthead and illustrations, etc.) about their partner. It’s a fun and colorful first assignment.

George Bullis
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Sandy’s posting reminds me of my junior American Lit bulletin board, which I have now expanded to include my sophomores and freshmen because they all loved it so much. I found this idea about a million years ago when I began teaching. I have 10 different quilt square patterns (maple leaf, baby blocks, flying geese, Ohio square, etc.). I give the kids an opportunity to look them over and pick their favorite pattern. They sign up for the one they want and I photocopy enough of each pattern so that the kids all get the one they want.

Then we raid the school library for old magazines which can be cut up. They find pictures from the magazines that they feel tell something about themselves (words will do, too). I pass out 9" x 9" squares of various colors of construction paper and they each choose a square.

Setting the pictures and construction paper aside for a second, they look critically at their patterns and decide just how many DIFFERENT pattern pieces there actually are in their square. (Usually there are only two or three, repeated over and over in different ways.) They cut out ONE of each of those different shapes, leaving the rest of the pattern intact. (THIS IS IMPORTANT; when they cut the whole thing up they have no idea how to reassemble all those pieces when it’s time.)

They lay each pattern piece over the magazine pictures they’ve chosen and trace around the shape. They often complain that they don’t get much of the original picture in this tiny triangle or square; I encourage them to put the piece over the most important part of the picture. Then they cut out the piece. They cut out enough pieces to correspond to the required number in the pattern. If it needs 10 triangles and one square, they cut out 10 triangle-shaped pictures and one square-shaped picture.

They use glue stix and assemble the cut-out pieces on the construction paper, following the original pattern (which is still intact). Then we all get down on the floor in the middle of the classroom (I keep my room arranged in a circle) and start to piece the quilt. The rules are:

no like colors next to one another and no like patterns next to one another. No reds next to reds, no Ohio Squares next to Ohio squares. In other words, the backgrounds and the patterns are true patchwork. They really have fun arguing over the final organization.

Then we read Teresa Palomo Acosta's poem "My Mother Pieced Quilts," which discusses the way quilts really used to be pieced, before they became fashionable. That is, from dresses, shirts, blankets and coats, and evoking in the pieces all the memories from the time the dresses were worn, the blankets kept out ghosts, etc. And we talk about how America is like a patchwork of many cultures, beliefs, people, memories.

When we finally put our quilt up on the bulletin board, each quilter has to stand by her/her square and explain why she/he put each picture on it—what does it tell us about that person? Then all year we look at our diversity, refer to it, acknowledge the difficulties and blessings that diversity brings us, as a class, as a school, as a community, as a society/world. In the spring students write about the quilt and take their squares down to use on the covers of their year-inclusive portfolios. It has become a very special process that kids refer to over and over when I have them evaluate the class each spring.

Judith Stafford
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I am so excited! Thanks to the individual who started this discussion. I love bulletin boards and try to make them unique and change them often. . . .

I love maps and subscribe to *National Geographic* every two or three years just to get the map supplements. This year, I put up a world map and a U.S. map and a banner which says "Reading is your key to the world" (I stole the quote from a catalog of some sort that was selling teacher stuff.) I then put up smaller signs with the title and author of stuff we will read in class and attached a string from the sign to the place where the writing occurred. My students do outside reading portfolios and I intend to have them add to the board with the books they read. In my school, maps are not a standard part of the English classroom (I have not had a map to use yet) and I find it helpful to be able to point out where the works we read are set.

My colleagues tease me about my elaborate bulletin boards. I've always thought they were fun and that too many h.s. teachers don't take the same time to set up bright appealing rooms that elementary teachers do. Children of all ages (and adults too) like bright, colorful places. The proof is that by the end of the year my classroom will be packed with students who eat their lunch there.

I believe they come to my room because it's a pleasant place to be, I am always there, and they feel good when they are there.

Kim Hutchens
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When I was teaching junior high, one of the best bulletin boards I ever did was to put the whole town on the boards! We used butcher paper to cover the bulletin board and an opaque projector to project a map we got from the Chamber of Commerce. Everyone helped trace the streets onto the board and label them. Then they all put little houses

where theirs were (labelled with their names, of course). Then we put in all the municipal stuff, churches, YWCA, etc. It got very elaborate and went on for a couple of weeks. Meanwhile, for classwork, we were also doing a unit on home/family/self. We read short stories, did pieces of writing, family trees, ancestor charts. Great fun. And talk about interactive!

Judith Stafford
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Put up a colorful background and put up the letters "The Publishing Place." Then let students share their own work there.

Donna Graves
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I really liked the quilt idea.

I'm a former elementary teacher, now an elementary teacher educator. I've always tried to teach my students (future elementary teachers) that bulletin boards should be for their students' work and projects and not always a display for the teachers creative/artistic abilities.

For most teachers, bulletin boards are often just one more time-consuming thing to do. For elementary and high school students, however, they can be an opportunity to work cooperatively with others or demonstrate their creativity.

One idea would be to have a sign-up sheet for the year and let kids sign up to work alone or with others on a particular board. It might be organized by the unit or other topic(s) you plan to work on.

Juanie Noland
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I reserve one bulletin board all year for calls for contest entries, "goings on" about town (plays, concerts, etc.—complete with map of the area. I'm always surprised at how many of my students have never been to a live performance) and newspaper clippings of literary interest. Students catch on quickly here, and start adding what they run across, too.

Marcia Tanner
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I have enjoyed reading all the bulletin board ideas. One of my favorite boards is a get-to-know-you activity as well as a self-esteem and writing activity. I use journals in my 6th grade English class and one of the first days I have students brainstorm as many ideas as they can about themselves—things they are proud of or things they can do well.

It can be anything that is unique about them. Then I have them choose one from the list to share with the class and then I use butcher paper and a stamp pad. I use purple because that is our school color. Each student puts their thumb print on the paper and writes the one thing they are proud of or want someone to know and then they sign their name. This helps everyone to get to know something personal about you and students love to put their thumb print on the paper.

Students later use the brainstormed list to create a first draft or essay about their accomplishments. This year I was surprised to hear that so many of my students ride horses and play instruments. I learned a lot about my students and that is always helpful to start off to a good year.

I usually put this bulletin board up in the hallway for parents to admire during open house. I call it "Thumbs Up!"

Ramona Paulson
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NOTES Plus INDEX, 1996–1997

Classroom Management

Discussion

Interdisciplinary

A Mural Project for *Our Town* and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (Motivator of the Month), Jeanette Pierce, December 1996

Poetry and Photography Intertwine in the Classroom, Doris White, January 1997

Language Exploration

"Delicious of the New"—ESL as Poetry (Share the Wealth: Highlights from NCTE Publications), December 1996

"Going Where the Lightning Is: Fifteen Ways to Start Writing" (Share the Wealth: Highlights from NCTE Publications), January 1997

Word Commercials, Anolyn K McKenzie, March 1997

Writing Takes Inspiration from the Random, Sheila Benson, December 1996

Literature

Children's Stories and *Beowulf* Shed Light on *Point of View*, Gloria B. Gibson, October 1996

"Heidegger's Experiment" and Decision Making (Literature Assignment of the Month), Bill Connolly, October 1996

How to Quilt a Narrative—A New Form for Book Reports (Motivator of the Month), Rose Reissman, October 1996

Immigrant Experiences in Literature (Excerpts from NCTE-talk), December 1996

Inkblots and Insights, Patricia M. Ward, March 1997

Literature Doesn't Kiss on the First Date, Margaret Clark, March 1997

Literature Meets Life, Marcia Fisher, January 1997

A Mural Project for *Our Town* and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (Motivator of the Month), Jeanette Pierce, December 1996

My Friend, Terry Boyle Falsani, January 1997

Promoting Real Summer Reading, Gloria Pipkin, March 1997

A Quick Chapter Review Strategy, Sharon Arbiture, January 1997

The Quilt: Exploring a Folk Tradition in Literature (Motivator of the Month), Edwina Jordan, October 1996

Small Groups for Enlarged Understanding, Margaret Mortenson, March 1997

Sound Your "Barbaric Yawp"!, Sue Heavren, January 1997

Media/Film

An Advertiser's Avenue: Learning the Value of Diction, Tiffany Andrus, March 1997

A Civil Liberties Critique (Motivator of the Month), Rose Reissman, January 1997

Pulling Prompts from the News, Rose Reissman, December 1996

Personal and Interpersonal Exploration

Biographical Scrapbook Project, Carol J. Schowalter, December 1996

House on Mango Street as a Springboard for Childhood Memory Writing, Rochmanna Miller, October 1996

Writing Bio-Poems, Dana Haring, October 1996

Writing a Children's Book Based on Your Own Childhood, Kathryn Kyle, October 1996

Poetry

"Delicious of the New"—ESL as Poetry (Share the Wealth: Highlights from NCTE Publications), December 1996

"If I Were in Charge . . .," Bonnie Chase, October 1996

Poem to Scene: A Lesson on Playwriting, Martha Harris, January 1997

Poetry and Photography Intertwine in the Classroom, Doris White, January 1997

Sound Your "Barbaric Yawp"!, Sue Heavren, January 1997

Teachers and Students Modeling Peer Revision, Karen Fatula Forgette and Debbie Pfetzing, October 1996

Public Speaking/Presentation

Literature Doesn't Kiss on the First Date, Margaret Clark, March 1997

Seeing Yourself As Others See You: A Low-Pressure Job Interview, Alice Cross, March 1997

Word Commercials, Annlyn K. McKenzie, March 1997

A Writing-on-the-Job Presentation (Motivator of the Month), Kathleen Wakabayashi, March 1997

Research

A Civil Liberties Critique (Motivator of the Month), Rose Reissman, January 1997

A History-Based Research Project, Bonnie Albertson, January 1997

An International Travel Project: "Backpacking the World," Lisa O'Shea, October 1996

Literature Meets Life, Marcia Fisher, January 1997

Writing

"Going Where the Lightning Is: Fifteen Ways to Start Writing," (Share the Wealth: Highlights from NCTE Publications), January 1997

Historical Fiction Writing, Jane Long, December 1996

House on Mango Street as a Springboard for Childhood Memory Writing, Rochmanna Miller, October 1996

My Friend, Terry Boyle Falsani, January 1997

Poem to Scene: A Lesson on Playwriting, Martha Harris, January 1997

Process-Product Pow Wow: Using Portfolios for Writer's Growth (Writing Assignment of the Month), Elizabeth L. Watts, December 1996

Pulling Prompts from the News, Rose Reissman, December 1996

The Quilt: Exploring a Folk Tradition in Literature (Motivator of the Month), Edwina Jordan, October 1996

Reading through Writing through *Rashomon:* A Reviewpointing Strategy (Writing Assignment of the Month), Rose Reissman, March 1997

The Reading Writing Workshop (Excerpts from NCTE-talk), January 1997

A Story Leads into a Lesson on Voice, Martha Bogart, October 1996

Teachers and Students Modeling Peer Revision, Karen Fatula Forgette and Debbie Pfetzing, October 1996

Writing Bio-Poems, Dana Haring, October 1996

Writing a Children's Book Based on Your Own Childhood, Kathryn Kyle, October 1996

A Writing-on-the-Job Presentation (Motivator of the Month), Kathleen Wakabayashi, March 1997

Writing Takes Inspiration from the Random, Sheila Benson, December 1996

Correction: A credit line stating the original source for "Small Groups for Enlarged Understanding" was inadvertently ommited from the March 1997 issue of *Notes Plus*. This idea is from *Literature Circles*: *Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* (Stenhouse, 1994) by Harvey Daniels, and is more fully explained in that volume.