

Embedding a Multigenre Project into the Science Curriculum

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The Demonstration

This lesson demonstration is meant to support my contentions that:

- A teacher must provide students with experiences in multiple genres in order for students to familiarize themselves with the variety of possibilities and be able to find their niche for writing.
- Given time, inspiration and freedom of choice, students will find focus and meaning, taking control of their own educational process.
- Students will better understand a subject matter when they are encouraged and allowed to investigate their own unique inquiries.
- A teacher must show genuine interest and model his/her own reading and writing interests in order to influence student curiosity.
- When students are given presentation experiences beyond their own classroom, with an authentic audience, student work becomes more purposeful.
- Providing applicable, meaningful and real-life experiences in order to introduce and build prior knowledge for a new topic of learning is imperative in sparking a student's eagerness to learn.
- Integrating reading and writing practices across other curricular areas prevents mastery of skills within a silo, providing stronger connections between content and provides a classroom experience more inline with what lifelong learning looks like.
- Maria Montessori's vision for education drives teacher decisions made in the classroom:

"We discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but by virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for children."

--Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development: (Writing invitations are woven into these steps.)

Day 1

Pre-Lesson

Sacred Writing (15) *Long Walk to Water*, Nya's story (first 4 chapters)

Lesson

Writing Warm-up (15)

- Think again about our sacred writing piece. Revisit that writing and if you did not choose to write about water, please think about this week's speakers, activities and field trips. You may choose to write about something that you heard this week having to do with water. WRITING: 10 minutes SHARING: 5 minutes

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development continued:

Multigenre Immersion (30)

- Gallery Walk (15) -- Walk around and read or look at the different writing examples. ACTIVITY: As you visit the pieces, you will see guiding questions for commentary IF you need some prompts to help you think about your response. Please leave a comment at 3 of the pieces as you walk around. You can leave your sticky note on the piece.
 - Gideon Mendel, selection from *Drowning World: Submerged Portraits* (art)
 - Andy Goldsworthy, collage (art)
 - “The Mad Angler’s Manifesto”, Michael Delp , *Lying in the River’s Dark Bed* (poem)
 - “Keeping Our Great Lakes Great”, Nature Conservancy (infographic)
 - “EPA Didn’t Know Anybody Was Still Drinking Water”, *The Onion* (satire)
 - “Researchers Find A New Way To Make Water From Thin Air”, *All Things Considered* (non-fiction, radio)
 - “The Color of Water”, Jerry Dennis, Adapted from *The Bird in the Waterfall: Exploring the Amazing World of Water*, illustrated by Glenn Wolff (prose)
 - *Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park (fiction)
 - “Our Thirsty World”, National Geographic (video)
 - “Have You Ever Seen the Rain”, Written by J. C. FOGERTY, Performed by Creedence Clearwater Revival (song)

SHARING and DISCUSSION: Read the sticky notes left at the different gallery pieces.

**What is the common theme amongst all the different pieces?

**How are these pieces different?

Read *What Do You Do With an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada (Author), Mae Besom (Illustrator) (5)

**Words that motivate us to not give up on our own thoughts and ideas!

**Introducing a project today designed to cultivate your own ideas, discovery and writing about water.

Discovering Your Topic (15)

READ ALOUD: Excerpts from *The Creative Habit* by Twyla Tharp having to do with research, organization, creativity and persistence in cultivating an idea into something.

ACTIVITY: 20 wonderings about your topic. Boxes with 20 wonderings or questions about a topic.

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development continued:

Brief Logistics: (5)

- What you will be responsible for:
 - Timeline of due dates.
 - Statement of purpose: an engaging summary of the project reflecting on the inspiration for the topic, the research and written pieces.
 - Presentation at Grandparent's Day.

Initial Writing on Your Topic (20):

- Initial thoughts and beliefs.
- What you know.
- Questions.
 - Choices / Examples:
 - Unstructured - just write off the top of your head.
 - More "structured"
 - List Poem
 - Acrostic on your topic
 - Letter to someone about your interests or intentions
 - What I believe statement
 - Provide a list of possible genres for those who need a little more inspiration.
SHARING!!

For access to any of the multi-genre pieces or handouts used in this demo lesson, please email sandra.besselsen@gmail.com.

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Possible Lesson Extensions and Adaptations:

- A community presentation at the city council or other appropriate venue.
 - *I like the idea of finding a community venue for each of the separate topics so that the students would be able to present to an organization that is most meaningful for their project.*
- Making a podcast to share with a broader audience.
 - *This is a great idea. I like the idea of making the project spread over a larger amount of time, maybe even a whole semester so that the students can create a podcast that would be dynamic with consistent updates.*
- Twitter feed instead of sticky notes on gallery walk.
 - *This makes me think of VoiceThread which I've used before and would be great for this project. VoiceThread is a digital space that is geared towards video, voice, and text commenting.*
- Send videos of presentations to stakeholders.
 - *This is a nice idea because the students will still be sharing their work, without the schedule and time restraints of the face-to-face.*
- Make a display for the public library.
- School wide celebration of learning.
- Graffiti posters on gallery walk.
- Invite Tristan Cole (or Larry Inman) to the school to share projects/findings.
- Send letters to President Trump.

Affect Demonstrated Throughout the Lesson and Described by Your Students:

- The lesson flowed really well.
- You pulled us in to help us remember all the rich experiences we have had around water.
- Your calming voice and lovely water themed wardrobe served to settle us in the lesson.
- Your materials made us eager to participate.
- You exude a warm and calm personality.
- You have a calming presence and an engaging thoughtfulness in your voice.
- You circulated through the room and gave each of us "one on one" attention.

Best Practices Modeled in the Lesson:

- A variety of genre models presented throughout the lesson.
- You gave us choices of how to respond to the multi-genre gallery walk.
- Multiple intelligences were represented in the gallery walk.
- The gallery walk was very engaging
- You front-loaded all the information and experience we would need for writing.
- You read aloud to us, using both picture books and prose.
- You gave us a tangible organizer to help us plan our projects.
- You devised a cross-curricular project.
- Rich exposure to multiple models and field trips provided us with opportunities to envision. Revisiting prior readings, field trips, and guest speakers, and addressing concepts provided opportunity to check for understanding.

Best Practices Modeled in the Lesson continued:

- Envisioning the project with Twyla Tharp's piece.
- You read us things that were above our reading level to challenge us and expose us to new ideas.
- You immersed us in rich language and exposed us to interesting vocabulary.
- You shared so many different pieces of rich texts crossing between children's and adult texts.
- You provided scaffolded support for our writing: "What do you do when you get stuck?"
- The project goals were focused and clear.
- You provided multiple writing invitations, giving time to write and wrote along with us.
- You provided a lot of opportunity for collaboration within and outside of the classroom.
- Use of music and the sound of rainfall that was soothing.
- Final writing connected to the project as a whole.
- Using the 20 questions model (Kelly Gallagher).

Questions That May Emerge in Teaching This Lesson:

- What happens if a student's project doesn't get completed or a student struggles?
 - *I worked with students one on one a lot during this project, mostly brainstorming, but then editing as well. One of the largest challenges was getting students to stick with a genre. They seemed to want to dabble here, there and everywhere, with a lot of great ideas. Moving from the great ideas to committing and hunkering down and producing the final project was challenging at times. The presentation at Grandparent's Day motivated all the students to have a final product that they were proud of. This is an advantage to having a live presentation with an audience rather than just a turn in for the grade.*
- How do you monitor students during the month of work time? How do you balance the time when some students need more time than others?
 - *Students had a due date calendar in order to help them stay organized. They were required to share their writing with the peers a couple of times, which created a little pressure for them to have work in draft form and provided me a check in.*
 - *I circulated through each of the students often, checking their writing progress and works consulted logs.*
 - *I used Google Drive and required students to share work with me as they were creating it. This allowed me to monitor the student's progress and provide feedback.*
 - *With the Montessori classroom, having a large block of uninterrupted work time is important so our usual work time would span over a couple of hours.*

Questions continued:

- What do you do for the kids who don't have a grandparent?
 - *Grandparent's Day is actually Grandparent's or special guest day. Most of our students have somebody show up. This is a school wide event so the students had other people visiting their work as well.*
- Could there be a reflection across the genres at the end? Could you do a self-evaluation at the end?
 - *I did add a written piece to their project, the Statement of Purpose. This called for the students to write an engaging summary of the project reflecting on the inspiration for the topic, the research and written pieces.*
- How do you assess this with the different genres and open-endedness of it?
 - *Assessments in the classroom I work in are not based on a one size fits all rubric. Assessments take on the form of a narrative based on each child's individual work. Assessments give meaningful feedback including highlighting interesting points within the work, applauding aspects of their work, and making suggestions that can be applied to future work.*
- How do you differentiate to take into consideration the students who are unable to do a project of this magnitude?
 - *The students had a choice in which genres they worked within. Choice naturally allowed for the students to choose work they were interested in completing, thus making it manageable.*

Common Core State Standards Embedded in the Lesson:

Speaking and Listening

- SL 7.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- SL 7.1 A Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
- SL 7.1 C Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.
- SL 7.2 Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.
- SL 7.5 Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

Common Core State Standards continued:

Reading: Literature

- RL 7.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.
- RL 7.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- RL 7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL 7.7 Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).
- RL 5.7 Analyze how visual elements contribute to meaning.

Writing

- W 7.4 Produce clear and coherent writing.
- W 7.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.
- W 7.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- W 7.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- W 7.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.