

Nature's Noticings in Non-Fiction:

Using Non-Fiction to Inspire Creativity in Writing and Illustrating For Students in Grades K-2

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The Demonstration

This lesson demonstration is meant to support my contentions that:

- Beyond teacher modeling in the classroom, students benefit immensely from closely examining writing from the real world (mentor texts).
- If students write regularly, are allowed to choose their own topics most of the time, and the teacher conducts daily conferences and allows an author's chair (sharing time), thinking will happen not just at the beginning of writing but throughout the day.
- Daily "turn and talk" time is valuable in that it conveys the message to students that their conversations are important whether or not the teacher is listening in, and helps the community to rely less on the teacher's reactions as the motivating force in conversation.
- Words are the most important tool that a writer has to work with.
- Sometimes we read a story for the story, but sometimes we read a story as a writer, recognizing the craft of writing.
- Students are inspired to write when the lesson involves a related hands-on activity.
- Students are empowered by being given a choice of writing assignments.
- The use of rich language encourages students to think deeper and make meaningful connections.

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development:

This lesson is intended for students in grades K-2, but could be adapted up to grade 5. I would begin this during or after our Science unit on Structure and Function, so they have had experiences with 1-LS1-2 Read texts and use media to determine patterns in behavior of parents and offspring that help offspring survive and 1-LS3-1 Make observations to construct an evidence-based account that young plants and animals are like, but not exactly like, their parents.

These activities would take 1-2 weeks to complete.

- Pass out pairs of stuffed animals to pairs of students. Ask them to work together to make observations of the two animals. How are they alike? How are they different? Record. Consider that they were live animals. Could you think of other ways they are similar or different? "Remember" the nature walk we went on yesterday? Who can name some things we saw? (make a list) How about things we heard? (be sure to write the sound, rather than the object) Did you smell anything? (20 min)

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development continued:

- Read parts of *A Butterfly is Patient* and *A Seed is Sleepy*. Make a chart of noticings. (15 min)
- Show on the screen the ABC Nature Activity Card Samples. Explain that one writing invitation will be to create a card similar to the cards on the screen. Again, notice what the author has done to organize the cards and create different final products. The use of antonyms, synonyms, questions, are all important here. (10 min)
- Read parts of *The Underwater Alphabet Book*. Turn and talk with a partner about how this mentor text is different still from the other texts, but yet has qualities similar to the topic. Write down these similarities and differences. This would be another writing option, but could take longer. For this option, knowing more facts about nature would be beneficial. Working with a partner or two may help this task go faster. (15 min)
- Writing task:
Using the nature list on the board and the noticings from the books, decide how you would like to write.
- Allow 20-30 minutes for writing.
- Share the writing with the class at the end of the session.

Writing Invitations:

- *Invitation 1:* Create an ABC activity card. Choose a letter, divide your paper into three panels, and decide how you will share information about your topic. Will you write opposites? Where it is located? Similarities? Maybe a poem?
- *Invitation 2:* Create an ABC style book about nature. Work with a partner if you choose. Be sure you can locate the facts you need for each item.
- *Invitation 3:* Using the mentor texts about the butterfly or seed, create your own page or two of text using a nature item from our list.
- *Invitation 4:* Write a poem about nature using the words you heard and your experiences.

Bibliography:

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- Jacobson, Jennifer. *No More, "I'm Done!" Fostering Independent Writers in the Primary Grades*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2010.
- Pallotta, Jerry. *The Underwater Alphabet Book*. The Trumpet Club, 1991.
- Ray, Katie Wood. *Wondrous Words, Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1999.
- Routman, Regie. *Writing Essentials*. Heinemann, 2005.

Possible Lesson Extensions and Adaptations:

- Create a class ABC book and publish it
- Bring a pet to school
- Research animals
- Write nature poetry
- Shape poetry
- Planting seeds/ start a class garden
- Binoculars and bird journal
- Virtual field trip to National Park
- Nature sketch book
- Doing what scientists do in the real world
- Skills for mind/body awareness- developing ability to sit still and contemplate

Affect Demonstrated Throughout the Lesson and Described by Your Students:

- Your calm, gentle, and welcoming demeanor drew us in
- We loved your consistently, joyful voice
- Your passion and energy to kept us moving forward
- Engaged us with stories of your children's Beanie Babies, which made us want to care about them, too. We loved picking our favorite animal.
- We were impressed with your amazing juggling skills when we watched you hold a ginormous clipboard and write while balancing a picture book.

Best Practices Modeled in the Lesson:

- Great literature choices to share as mentor texts
- Sensory details through real-world experiences (nature walk)
- Carefully planned selection of materials
- Offered many choices and models and possibilities
- You wrote with us by showing examples
- Monitored the group well by inquiring about our projects

Best Practices Modeled in the Lesson:

- Gave time to envision, talking to a partner before beginning
- Word study- parts of words (protective)
- Brain break related to the activity
- Let us “publish” our work by sharing with the class
- Variety of modes: books, paper on Elmo, computer images
- Engaged us in conversation about text structure and author’s decisions

Common Core State Standards Embedded in the Lesson:

- RI.1.1 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text
- RI.1.2 Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text
- RI.1.10 Read informational texts appropriately complex for the grade level
- W.1.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects
- W.1.8 With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question