

GOALS: Students will...

- Draw a map of their childhood home and mark an “x” wherever they have a memory
- Create a list of ideas for later development into stories
- Develop one idea from the list, learn writing skills throughout the process
- Learn some of one another’s personal and family stories

Rationale:

- To accommodate for varying writing needs, including students who lack emotive, expressive language skills, mechanical writing skills, and/or the motivation to write.
- To avoid the excuses, “But I don’t have anything to write about,” or, “I don’t know what to write about.”
- To use drawing as a pre-writing activity in order to provoke memories that become a list of story possibilities awaiting development.

Grade levels: Grades 3-8

Materials

White 11 x 17 paper

Pencils

Erasers

Pencil Crayons

Markers

Writing notebooks

Procedure:

- 1) Model for students how to draw a map of the floor plan of their childhood home
- 2) Show students how to mark “x” for each memory that comes to mind
- 3) Allow time for drawing and labeling of the childhood home map
- 4) Have students develop a point-form list: one point for each “x”
- 5) Have students choose one of the ideas from their list and tell it to one peer orally
- 6) Draft the story
- 7) Scaffold the writing process by giving individual feedback and doing mini-lessons about story structure (characters, plot, setting) and writer’s skills (ideas, voice, conventions, sentence fluency, organization, word choice)
- 8) Allow ample time for revisions and feedback throughout the writing process
- 9) Publish final story products and share

Suggested Assessment: Throughout the writing process, teacher does assessment FOR learning by giving feedback and mini-lessons to students about story structure and writer's skills based on their drafted work. Once published, teacher may do an assessment OF learning by using a writing rubric (good ones can be found in Ruth Culham's 6+1 Traits of Writing).

Analysis

Drawing and talking before writing were good strategies for getting reluctant writers started. Before we began our maps, I discussed with the class how this lesson would combine Art and English Language Arts, how the map would later help us to come up with writing ideas related to our personal and family stories, and how eventually we would develop one personal or family story in writing. As I predicted, the students were willing to do the map-drawing task even if they didn't look forward to the culminating activity of actually writing their story. It was a strong way to get their minds focused on all the memories and ideas their own life could provide to build written work.

Later, having the opportunity to discuss one of their ideas with a peer gave students more confidence when it was time to put pencil to paper because they felt that they had an idea about how to organize the story in terms of a beginning, middle and an ending. By selecting one idea from their list, then talking it through first, students had a much clearer vision of how to lead and conclude their personal or family story. In this way, this lesson sparked writing ideas and eliminated the comment: "I don't have anything to write about", and eliminated the question of "where do I start?" This may be attributed to the idea that telling something orally feels less formal and therefore less intimidating than writing.

I was surprised to discover how many of my students lacked the spatial intelligence to create a realistic home layout. For example, one boy drew a first floor that looked like an L, and a basement that looked like a Z. I am not an architect, but I am fairly certain his house doesn't actually look like that! Before drawing, we had discussed the idea that most houses are rectangular. I drew a sample of my childhood home on the whiteboard, and yet, a few students really struggled to create a map that reflected what a house really looks like. Several came to me saying that they forgot a hallway or a closet. I told them that the real focus of the lesson was to create a representation that brought memories to mind. The map need not be totally realistic to serve its purpose for the writing activity. However, in my mind, I was making a note about what kinds of math lessons or art lessons might later develop student's spatial skills.

When students used the x's on the map to create a list of words and phrases to represent story ideas, they used skills we have been practicing during note-taking in other classes such as science, social

studies and novel study. That is, they paraphrased or made short captions that reminded them of the story idea without writing full sentences. This type of jot-note list requires students to focus only on the essential memory without retelling the entire memory. Some students struggle with this, while for others it has already become an accessible skill. For the ones who struggle, oral feedback from me and my education assistants, as well as repeated practice, will eventually bring them up to expectation.

Finally, the map-drawing, list-making and oral pre-telling of their personal and family stories really helped students to begin and follow through with the writing process. I am certain that this strategy was instrumental in developing much better products of writing than would have been written if the lesson had just been “write a personal or family story from your childhood.” The pre-writing activities built up students’ confidence for writing and helped to support their writing process.

Overall, the childhood map lesson was very successful. It was also important to provide students with the opportunity to share their childhood memories and develop a list of personal and family story ideas because these activities prove that students DO have something to write about and they DO have something relevant and interesting to share.