

Lesson Outline for “Portrait Inspired Creative Writing”

This lesson is designed to be a part of a unit/mini-unit on creative writing, in which students will have been learning about powerful and effective vocabulary (wow words), “hooks”, effective storytelling, descriptive writing (show vs. tell), and more.

Day One

Prior to the lesson, print and lay out (around the classroom) pictures from the “Humans of New York” website. You will need them for later on in the lesson.

1. Allow students to explore the “Humans of New York” website (<http://www.humansofnewyork.com/>) – either independently or with a teacher guide. Encourage students to read various stories and their corresponding portraits. If being guided by the teacher, the teacher may read some of the stories to the students. As students read, remind them to consider the essential question “What makes a good personal story?”
2. 3-2-1: As students are reading the stories online, or after they have finished, they can complete a 3-2-1 chart, listing 3 things they noticed about the most effective story they read (those that grabbed their attention the most – why?), 2 things that were common qualities across all of the stories they read, and 1 way they would improve one of the pieces that they read.
3. Pair-Share: Have students pair up and share their observations as recorded on their 3-2-1 charts. Discuss as a class, and record ideas on the board as an answer to the essential question.
4. Following the class discussion/idea share, introduce the writing assignment.
5. Once the assignment details have been covered, introduce students to the portraits around the room. Do not tell them stories or any details about who the people are; rather, allow them to see that the portraits are present and that they will serve as the inspiration for their creative writing piece. In a gallery walk style, have the students walk around and explore the portraits – introduce themselves to the people in the pictures, and take a careful look at who/what they see. Have them select one image that appeals to them or intrigues them the most. Have the students take notes on details they notice in their chosen picture, notes about both the person/people and their environment.
6. Once all students have selected a portrait and have taken some notes, have them return to their seats. At this time, provide them with a copy of the questions to inspire their first-person narrative. The remainder of day one can be spent working on independent brainstorming/developing of ideas for the biography of the person/people in the student’s chosen portrait.

Day two:

Students should spend the second lesson working on writing a first draft of their portrait inspired creative piece. Teacher should check in with each student, helping them develop ideas and ensuring they are working on using their wow words, etc.

Day three

This is revision day. Students will need their first drafts with them.

1. Hand out revision sheets to all students. The teacher should go over the content of the revision guide, and clarify the revision process – this is not a process simply about editing for grammar and language conventions, but a process about improving/strengthening ideas, vocabulary, description, writing style, voice, and tone.
2. Students should partner up and read each other's work. Once they have read their partner's piece, they should complete the revision handout for the piece they just read.
3. You can repeat this process multiple times with different partners, as you desire.
4. Once at least 2 revision reads have been completed, have students begin revising their first drafts and creating a 2nd draft of their work.
5. At this point, how the teacher chooses to proceed is fairly flexible. The teacher may wish to have students complete the second draft and then conference with the teacher to receive additional feedback before revising and completing a final draft; perhaps they will complete their revised 2nd draft and then repeat the revision process with 1 additional partner during the following lesson before revising and submitting a final draft.
6. Students should complete a first draft, second draft, and final draft. Teachers can choose how they take the students from 2nd draft to final, but all drafts and revision sheets should be submitted as a package for assessment and feedback from the teacher.