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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume I: Medicine, Ethics, and Law

Science Writing for the Masses: A Primer

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.01.04
by Stephanie Shteirman

This curriculum unit combines the study of genetics with the workings of science feature writing. The unit is designed to be a collaborative project between a high school science teacher and the library media specialist. The science teacher is responsible for teaching the content which will focus on genetic testing, focusing on breast cancer. Students will learn how to write science feature stories incorporating what they learned about genetics and information garnered from several personal interviews and some first-hand research.

The unit, which should run about two weeks, gives science teachers a fresh approach to writing across the curriculum. Relying on my lengthy career as a broadcast and print journalist, I have tried to present the structure of a feature story in as simple terms as possible. The goal, of course, is to bring a complex and dramatic issue—genetic diseases and testing and the implications for the future—to the students in real terms by introducing them to the people who are directly affected by them. Students will meet or make contact with breast cancer patients, surgeons, geneticists, genetic counselors, gene test manufacturers and others who are taking part in this genetics drama. They will explore such issues as whether genetic tests should be off limits to insurance companies or whether family members should be tested if they have no symptoms.

Once they have researched the subject fully and spoken to all parties involved and learned the format of the feature story, they should be able to put together a first-class piece of journalism.

(Recommended for Journalism/English and Biology/Science, grades 9-12.)

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