



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume IV: Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary Art and Literature

High School Students Research, Read and Write Children's Literature

Curriculum Unit 01.04.04
by Sandra Friday

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Rationale

In spite of the fact that numerous units have been written on the subject of teaching children's literature, there are none written on the topic of teaching children's literature to high school students. At a time when there is grave concern about the literacy of school children, it seems crucial to teach teens the importance of reading to young children since many teens are themselves parents or have young siblings to whom they could read. Many of the at-risk high school students that I teach missed or were short-changed when it came to being read to, when they were children. Teaching a unit focusing on children's literature for high school students would give them a chance to enjoy, some for the first time, or revisit, the plethora of children's books that are available today, and arm these students with the rationale, skills and resources for reading to the children in their lives.

Theme of exclusion and being different

While I have team-taught a children's literature course to high school students in the past, I have never focused on any particular theme. The seminar "Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary Art and Literature" is an invitation for me to write my unit around the stories of exclusion and being different such as: *Lafcadio*, *the Lion Who Shot Back* by Shel Silverstein, *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf, *The Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss, *Frederick* by Leo Lionni, Bill Cosby's story about the new kid on the block, *The Meanest Thing to Say, Yo! Yes!* by Chris Raschka, and *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch. There is a poignant poem "Deaf Donald" by Shel Silverstein about a little boy, Deaf Donald, who signs, "I love you," to Talkie Sue. But because she can't read his language, she leaves "forever" and never knows that he is trying to tell her that he loves her. Because they don't understand a common language, they both lose out. Without a doubt there are excellent children's stories dealing directly with issues of exclusion. In real life there are countless ways to feel excluded and to be excluded because one is perceived by the status quo as different. This common theme that runs throughout children's literature gives children a much needed opportunity to explore what it feels like to be on the receiving end of exclusion and at the same time to heighten their awareness of the motives of those who perpetrate this exclusion on others. Sometimes the act of exclusion is as simple as the absence of understanding; it is not mean-spirited. Other times it is vindictive and perpetrated precisely for the purpose of making someone suffer. Studying these phenomena in children's stories will give the teens I teach a forum for looking at these issues themselves while they are studying them to read them to children.

One approach to this theme of exclusion and being different is to begin with this brief, one-page, illustrated poem by Shel Silverstein titled "Deaf Donald" from Silverstein's book *The Light in The Attic*. This poem is an example of the "absence of understanding" on the part of the characters. There are only two characters: Deaf Donald and Talkie Sue, whose names are immediately revealing. They meet and try to communicate with one another. Sue, of course, uses the means of communication that is familiar to her, talking, never realizing that Donald can't hear her. Deaf Donald uses the means of communication that is familiar to him, signing, not knowing that Talkie Sue can't "hear" him, and therefore can't understand him. Talkie Sue says to Deaf Donald, "I sure do like you. Do you like me too?" And each time he sees her move her lips, Deaf Donald grins a big grin and signs, "I love you." Finally she gets frustrated because he isn't saying anything, and she says, "I'm leaving you!" And she walks away forever, never knowing that he is signing that he loves her. He never knows either that she really likes him. I will ask my students to consider whether both Deaf Donald and Talkie Sue are deaf. Sue is so talkie that she is limited to receiving communication in only one way, by someone talking. So,

because she doesn't realize that there are more means of communication besides "talking," she misses, "forever," an important message that is being communicated in another way. This simple little poem makes a strong argument for exposing students to ways of listening to others, other than the one way to which most of them are accustomed.

Even though this is only a simple little poem, the story it tells contains some of the basic elements of effective literature: a conflict, a character who changes, and a universal theme or lesson. It is feasible to use this little, non-threatening, ten line poem for a CAPT practice around the question, "Is this an effective piece of literature, based perhaps on the three elements I mentioned: conflict, character change, and universal theme?" I have developed a CAPT practice lesson plan around this poem later in the unit.

Judgment and exclusion of a character also occurs when that character's behavior is contrary to the stereotype, such as occurs in *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf and in the story *Frederick* by Leo Lionni. In both stories, those who are judgmental and exclusionary are not conscious of their intolerance, they simply don't understand the atypical behavior of the character and they want the character to behave according to their stereotypical expectation. These stories open a door, limited only by our own creativity and access to resources, for lessons around how one's view of his/her own immediate world and the world at large determines his/her tolerance and empathy.

In *The Story of Ferdinand*, for those who may not be familiar with this children's classic, set in Spain, there lives a young, strong bull who has no desire to fight in the bull ring. Ferdinand's disinterest in bullfighting is contrary to all expectations; there has never been a bull that has not dreamed of being chosen to fight in the bullring in Madrid. But, not Ferdinand. He likes most to sit under his favorite shade tree and smell the flowers. Even his mother is concerned that his interests are different from the other bulls. Well one day, he sits on a bumblebee that is sipping nectar from one of those flowers, and it sets him off bucking and snorting around the field. It happens that on that very day men have come from Madrid, selecting bulls to go to the bullring. Of course, they spot Ferdinand and immediately, seeing him performing exactly as they would expect an ambitious, fierce bull to perform, they select him. They cart him off to Madrid only to find that when they turn him loose in the bullring, he just sits down and smells the flowers in all of the ladies' hair. He has absolutely no interest in fighting. The matador and his retinue are furious and frustrated, but there is nothing they can do but cart him back home so he can sit under his favorite shade tree and smell the flowers. The bull Ferdinand simply is independent, and while the community may be frustrated by it, they are forced to tolerate it. Ferdinand has no interest, nor need, to be like the other bulls.

In the story *Frederick*, a community of mice accuses one of its members, Frederick, of not doing his share of work when it is laying in a cache of food for the winter months. Frederick insists that he is working, telling them that he is gathering the warmth of the sun's rays and the colors of flowers. The mice reproach him and accuse him of "dreaming." Winter comes and the mice gradually eat all their store of food. Disgruntled, they then turn to Frederick and ask him about his supplies. Frederick then recites a beautiful poem in which he invokes all the colors and warmth of summer, and of course he warms their hearts in a way that no amount of food could. They are overjoyed and pronounce him a poet. Frederick who does not cave in under the judgment of his peers, who knows what his gifts are, is able to broaden the expectation of the community as to the possible role of its members, and to enrich the community.

The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss is a story about a community of Seuss creatures that look somewhat like homely cousins of Sesame Street's Big Bird. The community is split down the middle by those who have stars on their tummies and those who don't. Those who don't have a star on their tummies, are judged by those who do and

excluded from all of their "star"activities. Sneetches with stars make star-less Sneetches feel miserable and inferior, until another creature, the Fix-it-Up Chappie, comes to town with a contraption for putting stars on tummies, ___ for a price. The bulk of the story is a mad race of putting stars on the tummies of star-less Sneetches and removing the stars from the tummies of the resentful star-tummy Sneetches. Eventually the Chappie with the contraption has all of everybody's money and leaves town having capitalized on everyone's stupidity. The Sneetches all wise up that day and decide it doesn't matter who has the stars and who doesn't. Besides, by now they have all "offed" and "onned" their stars so many times, nobody knows, in true Seuss fashion, which was which. Seuss reinforces that while differences exist, there is a shared "humanity" among these creatures.

The very short story Yo! Yes! by Chris Raschka has only two characters, two young boys, one African American and one Euro-American who meet out on the street. The entire "hip" story is a one or two word dialogue between the boys. One boy asks the other boy questions, and we learn that the boy answering the questions is sad and lonely because he thinks he has no friends. Brief as this story is, it introduces a kind of exclusion that is self-imposed. We don't learn why the one boy feels so lonely, except he says that he has no friends. We see that the other boy reach out to him in friendship. When the boy asking the questions offers to be the other boy's friend, the story ends on an upbeat note, almost as quickly as it began. This is a superb story for two students to act out when the class goes out to read to elementary school students. This story, brief as it is, has three elements of an effective story: a conflict, a character who grows in understanding, and a universal theme or lesson. Using this story, it is easy to practice the CAPT language arts activity: "Is this an effective story? Explain why or why not, including evidence."

Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back by Shel Silverstein is probably the least hopeful and most profound of the stories I have included in my unit. It appears to be a somewhat silly story about a lion that defends himself from hunters on safari in the jungle by eating them up. He then learns to be a crack shot with one of their rifles. Shel Silverstein's illustrations of Lafcadio are charming. Mr. Finchfinger, searching through the jungle, recruiting new acts for his circus, finds Lafcadio and his rifle, and promises Lafcadio everything from fame to marshmallows if he will bring his rifle and be in his Finchfinger Circus. Of course, Lafcadio goes with him and does become Lafcadio the Great, shooting his rifle with his tail and even shooting it while standing on his head. Lafcadio gradually begins to do everything that humans do: wears suits, sleeps in hotel rooms, gets his beard and mane trimmed, paints, and even reads the National Geographic magazine while smoking his favorite pipe tobacco. But, in spite of Lafcadio the Great's fame and fortune, he is not happy. He is bored. There is one thing left in the world that he has not done; he has not gone hunting on safari in the jungle. And so, of course he goes. As he stands there in his little red cap, who should recognize him but his lion cousins. They insist that he cannot shoot them, for he is a lion. The hunters insist that he must shoot them for he is a hunter. And there stands Lafcadio the Great, struggling with one of the most profound dilemmas of our time: "In the midst of racial and cultural diversity, where do I belong?" Or, more to the point, "Do I belong anywhere?" Lafcadio the Great lays down his rifle and picks up his hat and walks away over the hill, away from the lions and away from the hunters. "And he really didn't know where he was going, but he knew he was going somewhere, because you really have to go somewhere, don't you?" This too is a poignant story for the CAPT language arts activity that asks students to evaluate whether it is an effective story.

The following stories, *The Meanest Thing to Say* and *Amazing Grace*, are about children whose parents and/or grandparents intervene when their peers mistreat or disrespect them. *The Meanest Thing to Say* by Bill Cosby is a "new kid on the block" story in which the new kid at school introduces a game called "the meanest thing to say" to somebody else to make him or her feel bad. The game turns students against each other and makes Andrew, the narrator, really mad and frustrated with Michael Reilly, the new kid. Andrew's dad helps him

figure out how to defuse Michael's game, and everybody gets back to playing regular games and feeling good, including Michael. The kids in the illustrations are multicultural.

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch is a story about an African American girl, Grace, who wants to play the part of Peter Pan in the school production. Some of her classmates, due to their preconceived ideas about the part, tell her that she can't, first because she is a girl and second because she is black. Discouraged by these prejudicial attitudes, Grace shares her disappointment with her mother and grandmother who give her the support and self-confidence she needs to try out and get the part. It becomes obvious to the students at try-outs that Grace, by far, is the best choice for the part. There are obvious issues of race and gender in this story and a lesson about the importance of moral support.

Researching on the Internet will provide the content, leading to a collaborative art project, a presentation, and finally to the five-paragraph essay

This unit will include a research component in which students will research, using the Internet, articles that support and explain the critical role of reading to young children.

This research ultimately will lead to an art project in which students collaborate to make posters promoting reading to children, featuring the salient points students found in the articles they researched. Each group of students will present its poster to the rest of the class. The class will keep a list of the most important points from each presentation, and this list of notes will be the basis for a five-paragraph essay. (See a lesson plan on how to implement this section of the unit.)

The Internet is a rich source of information on the vital need to read to young children from the time they are born; actually some research makes a case for reading to the developing fetus. The bibliography contains several suggestions for Websites where students can find articles on the topic of the value of reading to children. However, students may wish to expand their search beyond the limits of the list. This research activity gives students hands-on experience using the Internet while at the same time provides them with valuable content on the topic.

Once students have gathered a reasonable number of articles on the importance of reading to children, they will separate into groups of three and they will choose one of the articles they found or I will assign an article. The point is that each group has a different article. It is important that the class researches various aspects of reading to children such as: when to start reading to young children, how to go about reading to young children, why read to young children, how to choose books, how to teach your child to choose books, and strategies to help children become readers.

Each group will hi-light the salient points in the article it is researching. Then, they will brainstorm ways to advertise these points visually, including the use of catch phrases on a poster to promote reading to young children. Each group will create its own poster. Once they have completed these posters, each group will present its poster to the class, identifying the salient points of the article. The class will take notes on these points to be used in a five-paragraph essay on the importance of reading to young children.

CAPT - like Language Arts activities leading to the five-paragraph essay

There will be at least two opportunities for students to practice the writing process resulting in a five-paragraph essay. I almost always incorporate the five-paragraph essay writing process into the units I design. This gives students a framework to use whenever they are faced with writing an essay. These writing activities also will allow students opportunities to practice CAPT-like language arts activities. Both essay assignments will guide students in: crafting a clear thesis, fleshing out this thesis with observations, gathering evidence to support these observations, and then using their evidence in their support paragraphs in the five-paragraph essays. One of the CAPT questions asks students to assess whether a story is "effective." Students in past classes have brainstormed what elements make up an "effective" story. Usually they agree that for a story to be "effective," it must contain a conflict, a character that grows in understanding or changes in some significant way, and there must be some kind of theme or lesson for the reader. Children's stories readily lend themselves to this CAPT assessment activity and present a natural opportunity for students to engage in the writing process culminating in a five-paragraph essay. The teacher could make students aware of this assessment early in the unit and ask students to keep some kind of log as to which stories seem to meet the criteria of an "effective story" and which do not. Actually, students could enter this data on their annotated bibliography that I will discuss in the field trip to the public library section.

I plan to model this assessment early in the unit either with the poem *Deaf Donald* or with *The Story of Frederick*. In each story there is conflict, one or more characters grows in understanding or changes, and there are universal themes. This would be an effective time to use an overhead projector, first to model how one creates a thesis from an essay assignment, second, how one makes an observation about the conflict in the story and gathers evidence from the story to support it, third, how one makes an observation about a character who grows or changes and gathers evidence from the story to support it, and finally, how one makes an observation about the universal theme or lesson in the story and gathers evidence to support it. It has become one of my passions to dispel the mystery around the process of writing a five-paragraph essay with solid content.

The other five-paragraph essay, and actually the first of the two, will be based on: the information students gather in researching the importance of reading to children, their posters, presentations, and note-taking activity. With the notes students take from the group presentations, and with the posters available in the room for reference, students will be ready to make observations themselves about the importance of reading to children. They will craft a thesis on this topic, and make three observations that support their thesis, observations that they can support with the notes they have taken from the group presentations. They will use three graphic organizers, stating an observation on the left side of the page and listing the evidence to support the observation on the right side. Once they have completed their three graphic organizers, they will be ready to begin crafting their five-paragraph essay. There is a lesson plan that explains this activity in more detail.

Field trips that model "Reading for Life" behavior

There will be a minimum of five field trips to the New Haven Public Library where students will become familiar with comfortable surroundings and read lots of children's books, and write annotated bibliographies (a skill itself). I have engineered these field trips with major success. As a result of these trips, teenage students should feel comfortable about walking into the children's department of the library any time, especially when they want to take a young sibling, niece or nephew, or their own young children to the library. It is important that these trips to the children's department are well structured and students understand the expectations. It should be made clear to students that in order to earn a particular letter grade, they must read and write an annotated bibliography for a specified number of books. For example to receive an A, students must read and write an annotated bibliography for 50 books that deal in some way with exclusion or being different. While 50 books may seem like a lot, for only five trips to the library, I plan to gather books each time we make a trip and bring them back to the classroom, where students may read stories and write annotated bibliographies in class.

There is a model for an annotated bibliography in the lesson plan section of my unit. In keeping with the subject of exclusion and "being made to feel different," students will include in their annotated bibliographies, along with whether the story has a conflict, a character that grows or changes in understanding and a universal theme or lesson, what kind of exclusion each book deals with. The class will be studying types of exclusion through the books that I described earlier in the unit.

Students will make field trips to elementary schools where they will read stories they have practiced reading out loud and do activities they have prepared prior to the trip. Children love to be read to by "big kids" and teenagers love the attention they get from reading to the children. Everybody wins!

It is very effective for students to act out short stories for the class. Previously in the unit, I suggested that the book *Yo! Yes!* lends itself to this activity. It is possible, after two teen-age students have acted this out, that two young students might want to model the teen-age students.

In order for students to read to children effectively, they must learn how this is done. I think the best way for them to learn this is for the teacher routinely to model effective story telling/reading techniques. Story tellers/readers must embody emotions, body language, voice inflection, and sounds. I believe this is crucial if students are to become successful story readers and I have written a lesson plan focusing on it.

Final project: each student creates his/her own children's storybook

For a culminating activity, each student will write, design and illustrate his or her own children's storybook, focusing on the topics of exclusion and being different. Ideally students will complete these storybooks in time to take them to an elementary school where they can read their own stories to children. Students may, at first, resist this activity, insecure that they are capable of such an undertaking. However, as more and more of them begin the process, it is exhilarating to watch them "get into it" and discover that, indeed, they are creative. As this activity unfolds, ownership and self-esteem grow. The biggest problem becomes, giving them all the time they want to complete the project.

This activity is highly structured, including designing a "story board" on which they account for every pair of pages in their book, as part of the planning process. On the storyboard, students lay out the sentences, including dialogue that will appear on each page of the book. It is at this stage that students plan and sketch out the illustrations they have in mind for their story. By this time in the unit, students will have read many children's books and have lots of ideas about story lines and illustrations for their own stories.

Some students may choose to illustrate their stories with clip art from computer programs or magazines, if they are insecure about drawing. Others will discover that they have a talent for drawing. For some students who love to draw, this will be an opportunity for them to excel. Some may collaborate with one another. Each student is expected to turn out a book. This final project fosters pride and ownership.

Just as in actual commercially published books, students will write their own brief biography to go inside the cover, along with a small photo of themselves. Students may choose to dedicate their book to a parent, a sibling, their own child, or someone else.

The book *The Young Author's Do - It - Yourself Book* listed in the bibliography provides the step-by-step procedure, including the use of a storyboard, and it explains in detail how the pages of the book are assembled so that they actually feel and hang together as a book. It works!

Lesson Plan I: Teaching students the craft and magic of effective storytelling

Reading a storybook to a child or to children is unlike any other reading activity. The reader is challenged to fill the reading with anticipation, drama, participation, excitement and animation. Reading a storybook to children calls on the reader's emotions, movement, inflection and sounds. The purpose of this lesson is to fully engage my teen-age students in the craft of storytelling when they read to children. I have found the most effective way to teach teen-age students how to read/tell stories to children is to model reading stories to them. Repeating the varied model of reading to children is a very effective tool. Therefore, at the opening of class, a minimum of three times a week, read to your students. However, the modeling must be full of emotion, movement, inflection, and sounds. I have found it is necessary for me to practice before I "jump in" and model the craft of story reading for my students. Just because I am a good reader, this does not automatically make me a riveting reader of storybooks. Teachers must approach this as a craft, and crafts must be practiced. I push myself to be outrageous, to even act a little bit crazy, when I model story reading for my students.

Choose a story such as *The Sneetches* that has a range of emotions or feelings and movement or gesturing. Read the story out loud to yourself and identify these emotions and where the use of movement or body language will be effective. Consciously decide where and how to alter the pitch of the voice, its volume and pace; in other words, use inflections. As you read out loud, consider what sounds might be effective in particular moments in the story. The sound of silence has a lot of power; use it.

Once you have modeled the craft of story reading several times, invite students to try the process, consciously incorporating each of the qualities you have modeled: emotions, movement, inflection, and sounds. Students may be most comfortable practicing their craft with a partner first, but the idea is to invite students to read their stories to the class. Of course, they will then have these stories ready to take out to read when the class visits an elementary school.

Anyone who reads a story to a child or to children, or frankly, even to adults, will be able to measure his or her success by the response.

Making teen-agers aware of these qualities in story reading will also enhance their own stories when they come to the story writing activity.

Lesson Plan II: Practice answering the CAPT Language Arts question, "Is this story effective literature?"

Students will answer this question after reading and discussing the ten-line poem "Deaf Donald," from Shel Silverstein's book of poems, *A Light in the Attic*. For this activity to be successful the class must reach a consensus as to what "effective" literature is. In past classes that have tackled this question, students seem to agree that most stories that are effective have these three elements: (1) a conflict or a problem that needs to be resolved, (2) a character that grows in understanding, and (3) a lesson or universal theme. While "Deaf Donald" is a poem, it is also a story, and has these three elements. Because it is a short "story" poem, it is ideal for introducing the "effective literature" CAPT question. Once the students learn how to look for these elements in this poem, they can also look for them in the children's stories they will read, and subsequently in other fiction that they read. This is not to say that every single story or novel has these three elements; they merely make up one framework by which students may make a judgment about the stories they read.

Because this may be the students' first exposure to the question, "Is this effective literature?" I will model, using a graphic organizer on an overhead projector, how to identify the conflict and how to find evidence to support that observation. Students will help in this activity. Using graphic organizers and the overhead projector, I also will model, with the students' help, how to show that a character grows in understanding or changes, and how to make an observation about a lesson or universal theme, supporting both of these with evidence from the poem.

Each of the three graphic organizers in the following chart represents a page that I hand out to my students. Naturally, the organizer is blank when the students receive it, but I have filled these in to model the activity that I would do with the students on an overhead projector.

Once the students have made their observations and found evidence for each, it is time to begin the five-paragraph essay. Remind the students that they have been looking for answers to the question, "Is this story 'effective' literature?" They have been using three measurements: the presence of a conflict, the presence of a character who grows or changes, and the presence of a lesson or universal theme. Model how one takes the question, "Is this story/poem Deaf Donald effective literature?" and turns it into the thesis of the essay, "The story/poem Deaf Donald is effective literature because it contains the elements present in most good literature: a conflict, a character who grows or changes, and a lesson or universal theme." They now have crafted their thesis.

I teach my students that following the thesis, they will write three more sentences in their introductory paragraph: one that states the conflict in the story, one that states how the character grows or changes, and the last one that states the universal theme or lesson in the story. These statements should come from the left side of their graphic organizers where they have written their observations. Thus the introductory paragraph has four sentences, a thesis and three controlling ideas. I explain that these are called "controlling

ideas" because it is these three sentences that serve as topic sentences for paragraphs two, three and four. This model is very predictable and should give the students a sense of confidence.

I show the students that they open paragraph two with the first controlling idea in their introductory paragraph and they follow it with the evidence they have recorded on the right side of the graphic organizer. They do the same with paragraphs three and four, open with a controlling idea sentence from the introductory paragraph and follow with the evidence recorded on the right side of the organizer. If they are writing about an actual story, I ask them to record, on their organizers, the page number where they found the evidence and to include this in their essay. Students can see how the graphic organizers make the actual writing very straightforward; they actually have done the work by the time they begin to write the essay.

The final paragraph of the essay is the conclusion. I model how the conclusion, which is the fifth paragraph, is something of a shadow of the introductory paragraph. I explain to the students that it is effective to restate the thesis and restate the three controlling ideas. I refer to these restatements as a shadow thesis and shadow controlling ideas because they cannot be word-for-word from the introductory paragraph. The students see that the introductory paragraph and the concluding paragraph have four sentences. They can use this essay as a model five paragraph essay.

This essay is somewhat "bare bones," but many of my at-risk students have never learned how to master the formula for writing an essay. I have found that this exercise gives them confidence and a sense of independence.

I have even gone so far as to relate the five paragraph essay to the parts of a flashlight: the thesis is the bulb that does not shine unless the three batteries (the three support paragraphs) are charged and put in right, and the conclusion is the end that must be screwed on so that the batteries will all make contact and the light will come on. My students have responded very enthusiastically to this metaphor that can be elaborated upon.

(chart available in print form)

Lesson Plan III: Researching on the Internet leads to a poster presentation and the five-paragraph essay

While this is the third lesson plan in my unit, it actually comes before the lesson plan modeling "effective literature." Within the first days of the unit it is important that students understand that a lot of research has been done, documenting the importance of reading to children. They quickly see that studying children's literature is not frivolous.

Using the websites listed in the bibliography, I assign students in pairs to locate not only information at these sites but also other information they may find pertaining to the value of reading to children. It is, however, the articles from these sites that I ask students in groups of threes and fours to read aloud and to hi-light what seems most important. Each group is responsible for a different article. Once they have hi-lighted and agreed on the salient points, I challenge them to make a poster that will sell these points to the rest of their classmates and to anyone else they can pull in with their sales pitch.

This activity is very engaging, largely because it has a hands-on art component, and it is a winning way to start the unit. There is no art teacher in my program so, I always build art into each unit I write. You may

remember that my unit ends with a student art project as well, writing and illustrating a children's storybook.

Once the posters are completed, each group is expected to present it along with the salient points they found in their article. For example, one group will research the article "When Should I Start Reading to My Child?" Another group will research "Important Things to Know About Reading to Your Child." Another group will research the article "How to Help Your Child Become a Better Reader." There is an article on how to choose appropriate storybooks and another on how reading to children helps boost their skills.

When the groups make their presentations, students are expected to take notes on the main points each group makes. Each article should have a color code so that later when students are using these notes in their five-paragraph essay, they will easily know which article the notes came from. Once this activity has been completed and the posters decorate the room, students will be challenged to come up with categories for all of their notes. This involves the entire class coming up with categories such as: Why read to children? When to read to children? How to read to children?

Next they will take their notes and try to put them into the categories they have agreed upon as a class. This is an excellent opportunity for the students to use three graphic organizers for their three categories. It is important for them to keep track with color-coding where their evidence comes from, so that when they write their essay, they will give appropriate credit to the article.

Just as in the five-paragraph formula essay in lesson plan II, students will have to craft a thesis from the assignment they have been given. They will need to craft three controlling ideas from the three categories they agreed upon, such as for the category When to begin reading to children: "It is never too early to begin reading and to continue reading to children." After they have crafted their three controlling ideas, each of these will become a topic sentence for paragraphs two, three, and four. . .the support paragraphs. The color-coded notes they have recorded on the right side of the graphic organizers will serve as their evidence to support each of the three topic sentences. Thus, there is no need to panic about the structure or the content of the essay.

At last students are ready to write their fifth paragraph, the conclusion of the essay. I always advise students, when mastering the basic five-paragraph formula, to look at their introductory paragraph when they are preparing to write their conclusion. I refer to the first sentence in the conclusion as the shadow-thesis and to the following three sentences as the shadow-controlling ideas because they relate back to the introductory paragraph. The conclusion has the same number of sentences as the introductory paragraph.

This formula essay writing activity is very basic but it has been demonstrated to me that most students never learned this bare bones five-paragraph formula and simply spray their words and sentences rather than craft them.

Sample Annotated Bibliography (using *The Meanest Thing to Say*)

Annotated Bibliography

Date: 10/20/01

Title: *The Meanest Thing to Say*

Author: Bill Cosby

Illustrator: Varnette P. Honeywood

Publisher: Scholastic Inc., New York, 1997

Conflict: A new kid, Michael, shows up at school and he tries to make trouble for Little Bill and his friends. Little Bill has to figure out what to do about Michael.

Character change or growth in understanding: Little Bill learns with the help of his dad that there are ways of dealing with bullies other than having to beat them up and maybe getting beat up yourself. Little Bill feels good at the beginning of the story, terrible in the middle of the story, and finally he feels very happy at the end of the story because not only has his dad's advice worked but Michael has become a friend.

Lesson or universal theme(this might address how a character is being excluded or being made to feel different) Michael was trying to assert himself as the new kid and he was making everybody miserable. Michael wasn't a bad kid, but Little Bill didn't know how to deal with him, until Little Bill asked his dad what to do. Grown-ups sometimes have good advice because they have lived longer than their children. Little Bill learned how to defuse Michael's mean streak so Michael could be included in the group, and he learned that his dad had some good suggestions.

Summary: A new kid comes to school and makes everybody miserable calling kids names. One boy named Little Bill feels particularly bad about what has happened and takes on the challenge of confronting the troublemaker. Little Bill succeeds with the help of his dad and the troublemaker becomes a friend.

Rating: 4 stars!! Excellent book with colorful illustrations; a must read!

Bibliography

Books:

Cosby, Bill, (illustrated by Varnette P. Honeywood). *The Meanest Thing to Say* . New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997. This is a story about how a "new kid on the block" makes life difficult for others when he has his own ideas about games to play during recess that include name-calling, and how one boy, with wise suggestions from his father, defuses the new boy's game and makes him a friend.

Gutherie, Donna, Nancy Bentley, Kathy Keck Arnsteen. *The Young Author's Do - It - Yourself Book* . Brookfield, CT: The Millbrook Press, 1994. This marvelous book takes students step-by-step through the exciting process of writing a storybook.

Hoffman, Mary. *Amazing Grace* . New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1991. This story about racial and gender prejudice shows how mothers and grandmothers can be a great support system helping children through the hurtfulness that other children inflict, sometimes without even realizing it.

Leaf, Munro (drawings by Robert Lawson). *The Story of Ferdinand* . New York: Viking, 1936. This is the story of a young bull that

simply does not fit the stereotype of the fierce, charging bulls that fight in the bullrings of Spain. He likes to smell flowers, which is exactly what he does until one day when he sits on a bee.

Lionni, Leo. *Frederick* . New York: Pantheon Books, 1967. This story about a community of field mice includes one little mouse, Frederick, who, instead of gathering nuts and berries to help keep his comrades and himself warm in the winter, gathers rays of the sun and the colors of flowers and writes them into poetry.

Raschka, Chris. *Yo! Yes!* . New York: Orchard Books, 1993. This story is about a little boy who is miserable because he says he has no friends and no one to play with. But along comes the "Yo!" of Yo! Yes! and suddenly he finds, to his great delight, that he does have a friend after all.

Seuss, Dr.. *The Sneetches and Other Stories* . New York: Random House, 1953. This story is about a community where some members have stars on their bellies and some don't, and about how those who have stars treat those who don't. Those who have stars discover that stars or no stars, it really doesn't matter.

Silverstein, Shel. *A Light in the Attic* . New York: Harper & Row, 1981. A book of whimsical and poignant poems, including one titled "Deaf Donald," about a boy who tries to sign to a girl that he loves her, but she understands only spoken language, so she leaves forever, never knowing that he loves her.

Silverstein, Shel. Lafcadio, *The Lion Who Shot Back* . New York: Harper & Row, 1963. This is a poignant story about a lion who becomes such a good shot with a rifle that he travels from the jungle to the circus and becomes rich and famous, and gradually he takes on all of the characteristics of a man, except for the fact that he still is a lion underneath his fancy suits. Eventually the only thing he has not done is to go on a safari in the jungle where, of course, he must choose whether he will rejoin his cousins in the jungle or stay with the hunters on safari.

Websites:

www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Reading/Important Things.html "Important Things to Know" This is a one page article with basic common sense tips about reading to young children.

www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Reading/Basics.html#Start Young "The Basics" This one-page article stresses starting to read to children when they are very young, being joyful about it, and letting the story or poem work its own magic.

<http://209.41.14.122/qanda.html#ql> "Chosen for Children" A three page article clarifying when to start reading to children, what kinds of books to read, and how long to continue reading to children as they grow up.

www.readbygrade3.com/parentip.htm "How to Help Your Child Become a Better Reader" This article stresses that it is parents who lay the foundation for their children

to be good readers. It explains that reading is a long process that takes time to develop. The article identifies the details involved in a child becoming a good reader.

http://www.harcourtschool.com/activity_collections_preview/teacher_resources/help_kids_... This website is a wealth of brief articles including topics such as: "Read Along" (reading is a physical act, as well as a mental one); "How to Look for Books" for different age groups; "Repetition and Rhyme," "Poetry in Motion," "Story Talk," "Tot Talk," and "Book Nooks"

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