



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2002 Volume IV: The Craft of Writing

Improving Writing Skills in an American History Classroom

Guide for Curriculum Unit 02.04.07

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My 8th graders have a difficult time writing essays that address a theme or support a point of view. Yet in great contrast, during class discussions, the students show a remarkable ability to play with the facts and make connections. Somewhere between speaking and writing down the ideas, their thinking gets strangled.

The unit Improving Writing Skills in an American History Classroom is designed to help students write with a theme in mind and produce essays with a point of view. I have yet to meet an 8th grader who doesn't want to argue about some idea in history; and so, this unit will channel those debatable if not debated topics into writing lessons. In addition to working on writing with a theme in mind - taking a critical stance - the students will practice creating good topic sentences, detailed paragraphs, and strong conclusions. Students also will review grammar, parts of speech and sentence structure using sentence diagramming. The unit, although adaptable to any historical period, incorporates social studies content beginning with the Louisiana Purchase and ending with the settlement of the frontier just prior to the Gold Rush in 1848. Internet resources, including specific web sites related to our themes and a class web page will be used, as will tools such as word processing, Inspiration® software and PowerPoint®.

(Recommended for Social Studies and American History, grades 6-8.)

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