



English Language Arts

Resource Guide

PART II.C

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NOTE: This document is a work in progress. Parts II and III, in particular, are in need of further development, and we invite the submission of additional learning experiences and local performance tasks for these sections. Inquiries regarding submission of materials should be directed to: English Language Arts Resource Guide, Room 681 EBA, New York State Education Department, Albany, NY 12234 (tel. 518-474-5922).

Standards & Performance

INTERMEDIATE

The Autobiography

ELA
2

LISTENING AND READING – students will

- ▲ read/view texts and performances
- ▲ understand/identify distinguishing features
- ▲ evaluate literary merit

SPEAKING AND WRITING – students will

- ▲ use standard English effectively

ELA
4

LISTENING AND SPEAKING – students will

- ▲ listen attentively to others/build on others' ideas
- ▲ express ideas/concerns clearly/respectfully
- ▲ use verbal/nonverbal skills

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Grade 7

Students will write an autobiographical story, after reading autobiographies by various authors and learning the elements that make up an effective autobiography. This autobiographical piece is part of a student portfolio, (generically entitled, *The Language of Literature*) which will also contain other pieces that demonstrate student experience with various literary genres.

Students will need a Learning Log (notebook) divided into two sections:

- *Notes and Reflections* and
- *New Words*.

I think this is a good unit. It's student centered: students generate their own rubric, evaluate their own and others' writing, generate their own writing topics, discover for themselves what works and doesn't work in a piece of writing, specifically – autobiography.

Sean D. O'Brien

Day 1:

Introduction:

"How many of you have ever had an assignment where you had to write something, and you didn't know how to start, and you found yourself staring for long periods of time at a blank sheet of paper because you had no idea where to start?"

"Here's a technique you can use to help you find ideas for writing. It's called *making lists*."

Directions:

"On one side of a piece of paper, write 21 of the best things that ever happened to you. Write quickly. Even if stupid things occur to you, write them down. The object is to get at least 21 things. If you hit 21, keep going. You have six minutes." (Students and teacher write. For motivation, offer a prize to those who can surpass the 21 mark.)

"Turn the paper over. Same drill. Write 17 of the worst things that ever happened to you." (Students and teacher write.)

Voluntarily Share:

"Review both lists. Put a star next to three things on each list which you consider particularly interesting, important, exciting, etc.

"Take out another sheet of paper. Select one of the starred topics and write it at the top. Now we're going to make another list. You have three minutes. List every phrase, word, sentence, question, or idea that comes to mind when you think about that topic. Write fast. Quantity counts, not quality."

Teacher can go first. The purpose of the sharing is to give students a chance to add to their own lists things they may not have thought of on their own.

Do the same for all six topics. Now all students have a starting point for their own personal experience narratives. Students store these lists in their daily folders.

This activity is borrowed and adapted from Linda Rief's *Seeking Diversity* (Reif, 1992).

Day 2:

Introduce term: *autobiography*

Introduce "Hunger" by Richard Wright (p. 403 in *Thrust*, Scott Foresman, 1969). Explain that "Hunger" is an excerpt from Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*.

While reading, students should find two words they encounter which they don't know or aren't sure of. They should jot those two words, along with page numbers, in the *New Words* section of their logs. Later in the period, students will add the sentences the words appeared in, along with definitions that fit the sentences. The *New Words* section

of the log becomes each student's private vocabulary list, with words, definitions, and usages.

When students finish reading, they respond to the following prompt in the *Notes and Reflections* section of their logs: "Parents often have to do things that are difficult in order to teach their kids something. Be Wright's mother. Write me a letter (Dear Mr./Ms. ____) telling me about what happened with your son Richard. Don't forget to tell what you thought and felt about what happened and what you did."

Day 3:

Finish:

New Words—definitions.

Discuss:

Student responses to yesterday's prompt.

Explain:

"Let's assume that Richard Wright is an expert at writing autobiographies—he published his. Since we're amateur writers, what can we learn from Wright?"

Students Work in Groups:

"Today you have two jobs in your groups.

1) Go back and scan the story

"Hunger." Make a list of things that Wright does as a writer to make his story more interesting. For example, he includes his thoughts and feelings in the story (give example). Though the group discusses, each individual should enter the list into the notes section of their log. Don't forget to title and date the list.

- 2) Your second job is to do something to make sure that everyone in the group is involved in the group list."**

Give examples of positive behaviors: asking the opinion of a quiet member, giving positive comments, taking turns to give everyone a chance to say something.

Groups Finished:

Point out those groups who displayed positive group behaviors. Encourage other groups to practice the same behaviors.

Share as a Class:

Compile group findings on the overhead or chalkboard. Possible responses:

- there's talking in the story (dialogue);
- he writes good action (active verbs, vivid descriptions); and
- the story tells about one time (focus).

Explain that this information will be turned into a rubric which we will use to evaluate our own writing.

Day 4:

I have also had some success tying in more tradition curriculum items using this project, such as spelling. Spelling lists are generated from the students' own writing: students themselves decide which words, from among the ones they misspell, warrant their attention as spellers. And what better way to teach verbs than to have students become aware of them so they can use better ones in their writing?

Sean D. O'Brien

Introduce:

James Herriot and "Cat on the Go" (p. 350, *Prentice Hall Literature*, Bronze Edition, 1989, excerpted from Herriot's book, *All Creatures Great and Small*). Remind students that we are looking at Herriot as an expert from whom we can learn. Begin to notice what writers do in order to make us interested in the story.

As students read, they also find new words to add to their New Words log.

Day 5:

Group Activity:

Repeat (or do a variation on) the “Hunger” activity. The class shares, adds to the rubric.

Finish Group Work:

Stress group activities that check individual understanding (checking in to make sure everyone understands, asking questions, taking turns, etc.). Point out those groups who are successful.

Day 6:

Freewriting:

Students take out freewriting from Day 1. Pick one you’d like to work on today. *Sketch to Stretch* activity: “Draw a picture of your story. It doesn’t have to be a beautiful work of art. Stick figures will suffice. You decide how best to do this. Should you draw one picture? A series of pictures, like a comic strip? Decide on how best to visually represent your story so that you can best explain your story to a partner.” (Students have 10 minutes to draw.)

Students Pair Off:

“Use the picture to tell your story to your partner. Use as much detail as you can. If new details occur to you, add them to your list.” (Partners take turns telling their stories.)

Begin The Autobiographies:

“Now that you have told your story, take a few minutes and consider how you are going to begin. When you’ve decided, write the beginning of your story.”

Day 7:

Leads:

Explain that a lead is the author’s chance to grab the reader’s attention. Show students different ways to begin their stories. Have each student write two more leads for the same story.

Reciprocal Teaching:

“Get with your partner again. When I say ‘go,’ I want one of you to teach the other about leads. What is a lead? How do you write a good one? Use the leads you wrote to help you explain. When I say ‘switch,’ the second person teaches the first person. Any questions? ‘Go.’” (Teacher circulates, listening in on conversations, listening for misconcep-

tions, questions. Each student gets two minutes to teach.)

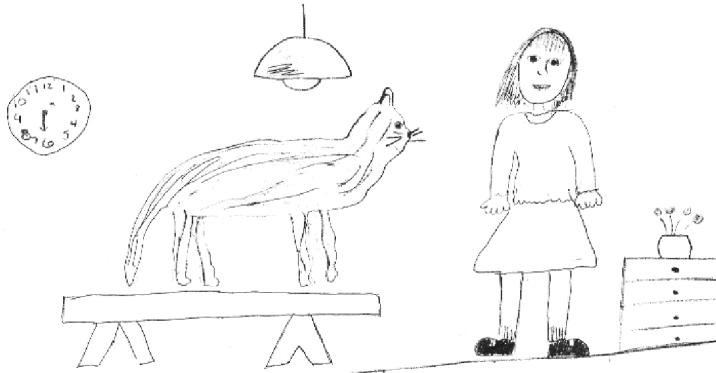
Reflection/Notes:

Students take two minutes and write in their logs everything they learned today about leads.

Share: *Optional.*

*The sample work includes three pieces, one which received an A, one a B, and one a C. The first page of the **A paper**, **B paper** and **C paper** are used as a sampler of student work. Each paper also received a grade for mechanics. Those grades are a little more self-explanatory.*

A paper



The author of the **A paper** shows mastery of all of the elements the class decided belonged in a good autobiography. There's a good lead, a conflict which drives the story (will Dad agree to getting a new kitten?), good dialogue, active verbs and figurative language ("I tackled her with questions."). It reads like a story. The writer also demonstrates an awareness of her own abilities and weaknesses as a writer, evidenced by her answers to the cover sheet questions.

The Cat

"Mom, why can't we get a cat?" I asked my mother.

"I've told you already. Your father doesn't want a cat," my mom tried to explain to me.

"Oh please! Can't you convince him we need a cat?" I begged.

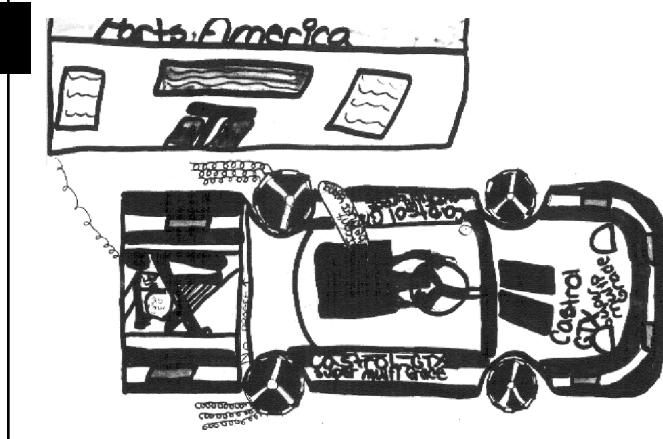
"We don't need a cat, but I'll tell you what. I can't make any promises, but a lady I work with has a cat who just had kittens and she's giving them away. Since your father's birthday is coming up, maybe we can get him a kitten as a surprise so he won't know we got it until the cat is here. However, if he has a real problem with it, we'll have to give the cat back." my mom said.

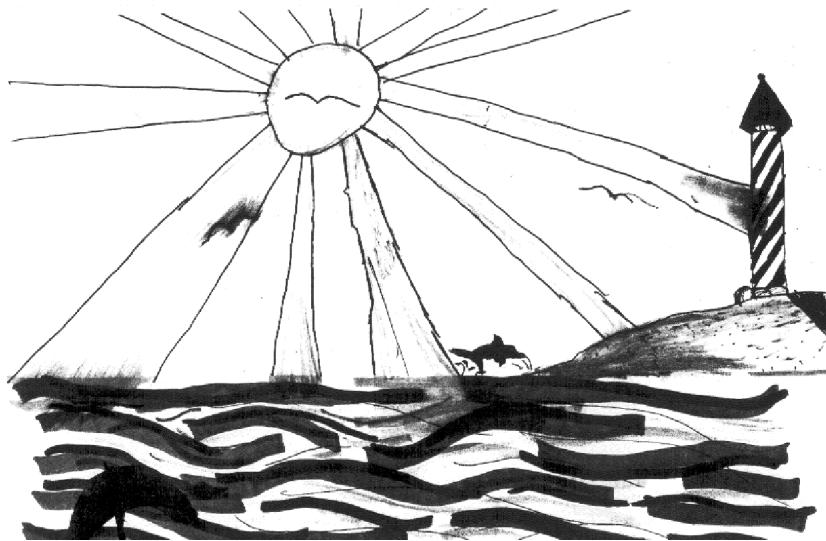
"Yes! Thank you so much mom. Please talk to the lady tomorrow," I said.

I was so happy! I couldn't believe my mom was actually thinking about getting a cat. I had been asking her for awhile and everytime, she told me my father didn't want a cat, but this time was different. She was thinking about it!

C paper

In contrast, the writer of the **C paper** is considerably less articulate about his own writing. The writing itself is weak. There is no clear sense of conflict (the tension that drives a story and compels the reader to read further.) He did succeed in adding a significant amount of dialogue, though much of the dialogue is trivial, small talk, and doesn't reveal much about the characters or the action. It seems tacked on to the front of an exposition paragraph which gives the details of the raffle. There is very little description, very little for the reader to sink his teeth into.





B paper

Day At The Sea

My family and my relatives had arrived to our beautiful blue beach-house, for our two week vacation in Southern Shore, North Carolina.

"Danny and I are going to go boogie-boarding", I told my father, who was lying down under an umbrella to escape the blistering summer heat.

"O.K.", said my father. So Danny and I got our boogie-boards and stared down the beach towards the bright blue ocean water.

"Can I go with you guys?", asked my little cousin Michael from the deck of the beach house.

"Sure, just grab a boogie-board," I yelled back and all three of us ran, as fast as we could, down the burning hot sand into the cool ocean water.

After many attempts of trying to remain standing on the boogie-boards, I said in frustration, "This is too hard!" as I flew off the boogie-board into the water.

Danny laughed and said, "Let's go build a sand fort."

On our way out of the water, I yelled "SHARK!" and Danny and Michael ran out of the water as fast as they could.

The **B paper** is much more successful in creating a scene in which the reader can participate. The boogie boarding anecdote bubbles with images: blistering summer heat, bright blue ocean water, burning hot sand. Though the paper lacks a central focus, or a tension (conflict) that compels the reader to read on, there is much here for the reader to experience. It is interesting that the writer felt he deserved an A because "I used descriptive words and I made the reader feel." His description of his own writing is accurate. However, his own assessment suffers from a kind of tunnel vision typical of adolescents: he recognizes his proficiency in one area, description and feeling, but fails to notice what's missing, in this case a conflict and clear focus.

Go-Cart Winner

The phone rang! My mom picked it up and said, "Hello" A strange voice answered, "Hi, is Kenneth there?"

"The senior or jr." my mom asked.

The man said, "The one that has won the go-cart." So my mom said, "You must be talking about the jr." Afterwards my mom calls me "Ken there's somebody on the phone for you"

"Who is it" I asked. So my mom said, "Just answer the phone," so I did. The man that had said, "This is Parts America and you are the winner of the go-cart." I said, "AAAH mom I just won a go-cart," my mom had said, "I already know."

Day 8:

Writing Dialogue:

Go over rules for punctuation, paragraphing. Students take notes. Then have Students write one scene of dialogue from their stories. They may decide to use it later, they may not.

Reciprocal Teaching:

"Teach your partner everything you learned today about writing dialogue." (Students also enter their notes/ reflections about dialogue into their logs.)

Day 9-?:

Present:

Any other skill from the list the students generated in the Day 3 and Day 5 activities. For example, using active verbs, making sure your autobiography has a clear focus, conflict, etc.

Workshop:

First drafts due tomorrow.

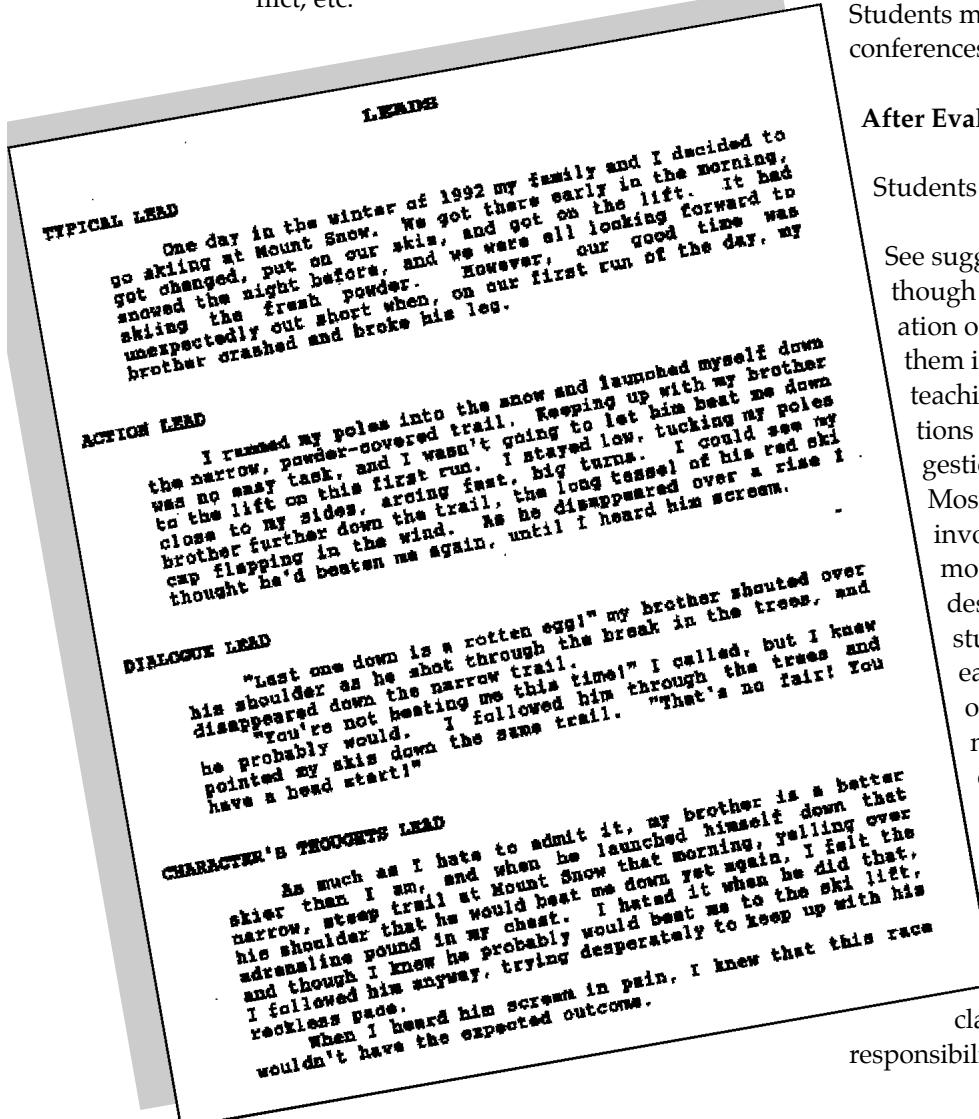
Hand out to students the rubric you constructed from your activities. Have students evaluate their first drafts using the rubric. Students may do this individually, or in peer conferences.

After Evaluation:

Students complete their final drafts.

See suggested autobiography rubric, though taking students through the creation of their own rubric can only help them internalize the concepts you're teaching. Obviously, the literature selections mentioned here are also only suggestions.

Most of the instructional modifications involved time. Many students needed more time to complete the activities described. I was flexible in allowing students to complete and understand each step in the process before going on to the next one. Students who needed more time had the option of doing work at home, or staying during the after school activity period to work with me. If many students in the class needed more time to complete an activity, I often created more class time. Students understood that if class time was granted, they had the responsibility to use it productively.



Assessment



Most of the assessment techniques I used were informal in nature.

One informal technique I use to assess group effectiveness is what I call, *The Walkaround*. While groups are working on a given task, I wander around the room with a clipboard, eavesdropping. I take notes on what I hear and see happening in the room. Usually, I've stated before the activity begins what specific group behaviors I want to see.

Most of the assessments I did were ongoing in nature, performed during the time the class was meeting. For example, when students are working on their *New Words* (see Day 2) I wander around the room helping those who need it, but also checking students' understanding of the words with spot checks.

However, the final assessment of the autobiographies is much more involved. Each paper takes about 5-10 minutes to grade, since I'm also reading and commenting on the cover sheet and the conference sheet.

Later in the unit, we posted on a wall our *Successful Group Behaviors*:

- include everyone,
- stay on task,
- use positive language,
- listen, and
- check that everyone understands.

After the group activity concludes, I report my observations to the class. I laud those groups who demonstrated positive behaviors, critique those groups who need to improve. Students take this feedback to heart, and I almost always see improvement in those groups who need it. Also, my mere presence next to a group while that group is working cajoles the group members into an awareness of successful behaviors. More than once I've noticed someone yelling "Shut up!" to a fellow member, and wandered over to that group, clipboard in hand, only to have a group member notice me and gently admonish the offender with, "Remember, we have to use positive language!"

The Autobiography acknowledges a variety of learning styles: students must draw and orally tell their stories, as well as write them.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY RUBRIC

Author _____ Date _____

Content:

A) Autobiography reads like a story. The story is focused; it tells about one time. Thoughts, feelings, and dialogue are compactly used to reveal much about the characters and their circumstances. Characters face and resolve a clear conflict, and the story is driven and paced with this conflict. The lead is a grabber. Descriptions are stunning and sensory, with ample metaphors and vivid, active verbs. There is a strong sense of audience here; the reader is entertained and informed. This story is hard to put down.

B) Autobiography still reads like a story, though many of the devices are less adeptly handled. The story is focused; it tells about one time. There is some dialogue, but the writer may tend to explain characters rather than letting them talk. Thoughts and feelings of the characters are clear, though there may be a need for more. The writer does an adequate job of driving the story and keeping the reader's attention with a clear conflict, demonstrating that he or she is aware of the purposes of audience. There's a good lead. Descriptions are adequate for the purposes of audience. There's a little good work, this could be a good story.

C) This writer is struggling, though not entirely without success. Focus may be a problem; the writer may be trying to tell too much in one story. There may be several lines of dialogue, though it is superficial, and doesn't reveal much about the characters or the action. Thoughts and feelings are used similarly, as if they are not a necessary part of the story. Sense of audience is weak; there may be no conflict, or a conflict that is unclear, and the reader is left unsatisfied. There is some description, perhaps an active verb or two, few or no metaphors. This writer may be able to recognize successful elements in other stories, but needs a lot of practice incorporating them into his or her own writing.

D) This is a weak paper. It reflects little or no effort, or an inadequate understanding of the elements of a successful autobiography, or both. Writer needs to select a clearer focus. Writer needs to add dialogue, or both. Writer needs to tell more so the reader can create an image in his mind. Writer needs to tell more about characters' thoughts and feelings, so the reader understands why the actions are important or significant. Other elements are not enjoyable to read, and should be done over.

Comments:

Notes on Peer Conferences

I used the following procedure to teach peer conferences: Tell students, "Before you can have a writing conference in which you can get helpful feedback from a partner, you must first determine the focus of the conference. You do this by completing PART I of the Writing Conference Record form before your conference.

"Think of PART I this way: is your autobiography, in its present draft form, going to get a grade of 100? Is it perfect? Probably not. So what, in your opinion, is going to keep you from getting a 100? Ignore mechanical aspects of your writing for now. Concentrate on the content. Use the rubric as a guide. Where do your doubts lie, as a writer? If you could do one thing to improve this piece, what would it be? These are the areas you will use to focus your conference."

In explaining the conference procedure, I stress good listening skills (eye contact, no interruption, positive language) and the importance of eliciting good, specific feedback.

Having students complete part one of the conference form helps them get their partners to speak more specifically about the writing.

| | | |
|--|----------------------|--------------|
| NAME _____ | DATE _____ | PERIOD _____ |
| WRITING CONFERENCE RECORD | | |
| <i>PART I (do this before you seek out a partner for your conference):</i> | | |
| 1. the writer, have the following question(s) or concern(s) about this piece of writing: | | |
| <i>PART II (see instructions on reverse side):</i> | | |
| 1. what do you like about the writing? | | |
| 2. What questions do you have about the writing? What do you want to know more about? | | |
| 3. What suggestions do you have for making the writing better? | | |
| Working Title _____ | partner's Name _____ | |

For example, students:

- are required to do more than just regurgitate knowledge the teacher has fed them: they must *use* what they learn about conflict, writing a good lead, active verbs etc. to create their own piece of effective writing. Current research shows that students learn more when they must take their new knowledge beyond the attainment dimension, integrate it with what they already know (in this case, their own experience as a topic for writing), and use it to produce something tangible, valuable.
- experience with autobiography is authentic: they approach the task as a professional writer would, by studying what works and what doesn't, by learning and trying new techniques, by making decisions in their own writing and justifying those decisions.

The Unit Could:

 be improved by creating a more authentic audience. Perhaps a class magazine could be published, so that students could produce writing they know from the outset will be read by their peers. Such a project could tie into other learning standards as well. For example, the magazine could include reviews of autobiographical books or articles.

 certainly be broadened to a study of other genres as well. What works when writing a short story, for example, or a sonnet, or a play?



FINAL DRAFT COVER SHEET

NAME _____ DATE _____
ASSIGNMENT _____ PERIOD _____

1. Briefly describe what changes or revisions you made between your rough draft and your final draft, and *why* you made those changes. Be specific: refer to specific examples in your piece of writing.

2. Briefly state what you learned about writing working on this piece. This can concern any aspect of writing: content, process, or editing. Be specific.

3. What did you do well on this piece of writing?

4. What do you feel needs improvement on this piece of writing?

5. What grade do you think you deserve?

Standards & Performance

ELEMENTARY

Rip Van Winkle

**ELA
1**

SPEAKING AND WRITING – students will

- ▲ present information clearly

**ELA
2**

SPEAKING AND WRITING – students will

- ▲ present personal responses to literature

**ELA
3**

SPEAKING AND WRITING – students will

- ▲ express opinions

**ELA
4**

LISTENING AND SPEAKING – students will

- ▲ recognize kind of interaction appropriate

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Grade 2 & 3

Students are expected to listen to and read versions of *Rip Van Winkle* to compare and contrast singularities and differences. They become familiar with the stories through multiple retellings illustrating scenes dramatizing parts or rereading aloud. Students break the story into chronological parts as they list the settings they believe important to the dramatization of the story. For each setting students list the characters involved. Each setting then becomes an act of the play. Working in self selected groups of 3-5 members, students use the list of characters and the setting to develop the dialogue and stage directions for their own production of *Rip Van Winkle*. The script is revised and edited students complete job applications for the roles they desire. Roles are chosen, students rehearse, create scenery and costumes and perform their play for the school and community.

The cooperative atmosphere developed by the students extended to the staff in the building involving the custodian and learning workshop, speech and language art, and music specialists. Colleagues cooperated to work around each other and the tight schedule of the cafeteria/gym/stage.

Variations of The Story

This learning experience is the result of the spontaneous display of interest demonstrated by students in the second and third grade class. After learning and seeing a read aloud of Thomas Locker's beautifully illustrated picture book, *Rip Van Winkle*, the students asked to dramatize the story. (The students are familiar with dramatization as a means of responding to the story from their language arts experiences in the primary grades.)

Teacher and students gather copies of different variations of *Rip Van Winkle*. Students "raid" local public libraries and bring the books to school to share and trade to read and discuss. The stories are read and revisited many times throughout the experience.

Students use reading logs to record reactions, make observations, and compare/contrast versions of the story. Using chart paper, students in small groups, generate lists of similarities and differences between versions of the story. Students ask to have particular versions reread.

Plan

The students request to do a play for the whole school and agree to write their own version. As a class, students develop a chronological list of settings they find common to each version of the story. Their list shows six separate settings. Each setting becomes a scene in the script. Using each setting as a scene, the students read the story again to list the characters needed for each scene. The class discusses the traits of each character and each member of the class thinks about which role he/she will apply for.

Students fill out job applications stating their desired role and their qualifications for the role. (A student who receives learning workshop support wants to complete

her application in the learning workshop. Because it is a job application she wants her spelling to be right.) With the exception of two students who want the same role, there is no conflict for roles among job applications. Perhaps this is because each role is described for its uniqueness and importance to the project as a whole. Each student receives his or her first choice of role.

Rip Van Winkle Application Form

Name _____

I am interested in applying for a part in the Rip Van Winkle play.

I would like to play the role of Old Judith because I love acting and I'm good at it. I have performed before in front of strangers. I get into my part good! My memorizing is good, but if I forget-I know what to do.

I would like to play the role of Young Rip because I would be strong and I can relate to being lazy.

I would like to play the role of Costumes because I am good at picking costumes. I'm picky.

scene: Outside 1980s

RIP

What happened to my
form it looks like an
earth - ~~quake~~ could be
That isn't it? What
was your mother
name? What happened
to her? What was your
father's name? Judith don't
you recognise me? I'm
your father, RIP Van
Winkle. I can still
do the electric slide.

1st draft:
edit for spelling

Why are all
houses and all
here. What happened
Why do I have a ~~baby~~
What's going on. ~~Dad~~
anyone remember
me? RIP Van Winkle.

Script

After students know which role they will portray, they divide by scene to write stage directions and dialogue. They use the chart listing characters by scene to decide which scene they work on. Using blank transparency sheets and a variety of colors of overhead markers, characters script their lines by scene. At the end of each work session the draft scripts are displayed on the overhead and edited by the class for spelling, grammar, content, and effect. Although it seems choppy during the first two work sessions, the students benefit from the repetitions as they read

and reread the scenes of the developing script. During the revision and editing, students are keenly aware that their younger siblings and parents will be among the audience. This awareness plays an important part in editing the violence and language sometimes included in the draft. Group revisions continue for several days until the completed, cohesive script meets everyone's approval. The final draft of the script is typed on the computer for easy revision and then made into overheads for display for final revisions and changes.

2nd Draft

NARRATOR When Rip woke up his dog was gone and his gun was rusty. He looked around and didn't recognize where he was. He walked and walked through the trees. He remembered the way back to his house.

NARRATOR When he got to his house he couldn't believe his eyes. It looked even worse than when he left it.

RIP What happened to my farm? It looks like an earthquake! Why are all these houses and people here? What happened? What's going on here? Oh oh! Dame Van Winkle is really going to be mad about this. This place looks terrible. Judith? Young Rip? Where is everybody? You who? Anybody there? Judith? Rip? Dame Van Winkle?

NARRATOR Seeing no one, Rip headed into town.

M' C Who is that old man? I've never seen him before.

JU ... He looks familiar. I wonder why.

DF ... I wonder where he came from.

CH ... I think I should meet him.

AL Is he an alien from Pluto or another planet? Is he one of Henry Hudson's men?

DF ... Henry Hudson! You believe that old tale? He is an old man.

JU ... He looks like a funny old man. He looks like he's lost.

JE ... He looks like a nice guy.

AL ... Let's go meet him.

PEDDLERS Pogs! Pogs for sale. Nine cents a pog!

TOWNSPEOPLE For he's a jolly good fellow. For he's a jolly good fellow. For he's a jolly good...HUH ... who is that old man?

RIP Where am I? What is that flag? I'll find out. General Washington! Who's he? What happened to King George?

CH ... I wonder if he was in the war or something.

1776 WHAT WAR IS THIS?

RIP (What war? What are they talking about? I don't think I'll go back to that farm again!)

the peddlers use "Pogs" to
show that Rip is now
in the modern times

2nd draft: Adding details to help the audience understand
the setting (time).

Costumes & Scenery

Throughout the drafting of the script, students refer to the type of costumes characters might use. Students gather and create their own costumes from clothing donations, attic collections, and from cardboard and scraps. They design the scenery from donated cardboard appliance boxes. The art specialist helps the students with size, lettering and

perspective as they create the woods, the tavern and the Van Winkle house.

Rehearsals

Initially, students rehearse with the script displayed backstage on the overhead. They find this distracting them and they choose to proceed without the script displayed. They seem to know not only their own lines, but also the

lines of other characters in their scene because they have collaborated in the script writing. The music teacher coaches with sound projection and the set-up of microphones. The students learn to speak loudly over the sound of the custodial equipment cleaning the multi-purpose and much used cafeteria/gym/auditorium. Once the students rehearse the entire play the rehearsal is videotaped for students to assess their work. They share comments informally and use their logs to write more formal observations and goals.

After consulting little league schedules and parent commitments, students schedule an evening performance for parents, siblings and families of the cast. They schedule an additional performance for the school for the morning after the family performance. After a

mini-lesson about what kinds of important information is included in an invitation, each student designs, creates and delivers an invitation to every class in the school. Each student drafts, revises and edits a letter of invitation for his/her family.

Performance

Parents, siblings and extended families fill the gym. For some students, this was the first time classmates see them in full costume. Compliments and words of encouragement are shared. A parent who owns a local restaurant sets up a refreshment table and contacts families to bring desserts for an after performance celebration. The principal attends the performance.

Instruction

Each member of the group is responsible for an aspect of the production. To support the success of all students:

- support staff play an important part in the success of the students,
- speech and language specialist works with the students under her care,
- learning workshop teacher helps students write the script cooperatively,
- teaching assistant is an invaluable asset for both the students and the classroom teacher, and
- collegial support and student monitoring successfully assures student involvement.

Environment

Multiple work areas are needed for small group collaboration:

- large work areas are needed to paint scenery,
- use of hallways and a small classroom annex are helpful,
- weather permitting, painting scenery out of doors makes clean-up much easier, and
- custodian helps arrange the cafeteria cleaning schedule and the chair set-up for the evening and school-wide daytime performances.



Students generate a class plan including goals, materials and time line during discussions. Students use reading logs to document reactions and responses to literature. Listing characters and scenes assesses student understanding of the chronology, characters, story development and plot. Reading and writing skills and techniques can be assessed through written response, job

applications, script drafts and letters of invitation. During script development, progress is monitored on a daily basis. Students use an overhead marker of a color different than the previous day's so that each day's progress is clear. This also helps to differentiate revisions and editing. Mini-lessons on editing, spelling, grammar and content are based upon the needs displayed in student writing. Speaking and listening skills are addressed during group work and during rehearsals. Videotaped rehearsals and audience reaction also provide feedback to students. Students are involved in self-assessment and peer coaching on a regular and informal basis. At the end of the activity, the students were asked to write three things they learned about doing a play. They were also asked to reflect on the best and worst part of the experience.

This particular learning experience began during the first week of school, hibernated during the winter, and came into bloom in the spring. The class invested approximately five to eight hours a week for a little less than six weeks for script development, rehearsals, and performance.

Reflection

Despite the teacher's skepticism, each student became invested in the common goal of creating a quality production. Teaching and learning took place in small groups, large groups and on an individual basis. Students looked back at their reading logs, scripts, and scenery and identified their roles in the creation of the final product. The climate of the classroom community supported the risk taking involved in self-evaluation and public performance. The value of each student's contribution was important. One of the four narrators was a student receiving reading support services. The interdisciplinary nature of this experience capitalized on student strengths while addressing student needs.

REFLECTION: REFLECTION:

Sample Student Reflections

What did you learn about being in a play?

- I thought it took longer to make a play.
- When you forget your lines just make them up.
- You are still frightened even when you've done it before.

What do you know now that you did not know before?

- When you make a mistake don't think you ruined the play.
- You can choke easily, but you live to pull through.

What was the best part of writing and creating your own play?

- When they applauded.
- I didn't know my family would come to the play.
- Food after the play.

What was the worst part of writing and creating your own play?

- When 500 people were staring at me.
- Its frightening.