

# Eastern Illinois Writing Project

Summer Institute 2019



I-Search Research Anthology

# I-Search 2019

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I-Search (Draft): Reading Like a Writer

## **Introduction: How I got interested in this topic**

My students are majority seniors, but most of them still do not know how to read well. While they can comprehend the words on the page, and most of them can decode and make meaning with fluency, I feel that in one particular type of reading, an essential type of reading for college, I have allowed them to remain illiterate: how to read like a writer. I have broached the subject in my AP English Language and Composition classes, in an elusive exercise called “rhetorical analysis” wherein we examine a text’s speaker, purpose, and audience and have a sort of scavenger hunt for the author’s choices, but my students’ findings have largely seemed superficial or overly technical, such as observing different forms of repetition or other countable devices within a copy of a speech.

Right before the start of my NWP summer institute, I was a part of the exam reading for AP English Language in Tampa, Florida, where I scored over 1,700 rhetorical analysis essays. I quickly established that I was not the only instructor struggling with superficial reading for a text’s craft. It seemed like every other essay said the exact same thing about the author’s choices, none of which were likely decisions the author ever thought about while creating his text, given the complex situation under which it was written. In fact, the best essays seemed to focus more on the complex situation under which it was written.

The best part of an AP reading is the exchange of ideas that take place at dining tables with educators from around the country. During one lunch filled with commiserating on the precise issue I have described, one fellow English teacher from South Dakota shared that she had found it best to skip teaching the “devices” altogether and train her students to “read like writers.” The process seemed to involve re-reading and a T-chart,

and from what I gathered, her students seemed to be scoring significantly higher on the AP Exam each year than mine. Hastily making a note in my phone on this and many other good ideas I gathered from the week, I started mulling over what I ever learned as a student about “reading as a writer.” Not too much came to mind.

### **Description of the search**

The regular additions to a blog for the summer institute were instrumental in pushing me to regularly consider and learn a little more each day about reading like a writer. My professor, Dr. Murray, helpfully responded to my early posts with some resources to help point me in the right direction. With a combination of her guidance and more Googling, I was able to find a few professional publications on this subject. Early explorations of these resources prompted some big questions on the topic, including:

1. What are different definitions of “reading like a writer”?
2. What are the categories of noticing that must take place to read like a writer?
3. How do we teach this to adolescent readers?

Another part of the search happened naturally; as I continued to read for pleasure myself, I started trying to think metacognitively about the processes that helped me understand and evaluate the work. It so happened that I had just recently started presidential hopeful Pete Buttigieg’s book *Shortest Way Home* and I tried to apply some of the strategies to my reading of it.

### **What I found out**

The dearth of search results on this phrasing of the task, to “read like” or “reading like” a writer, suggests that the concept itself has many different names. I considered broadening my search to include “rhetorical analysis,” “close reading,” or “analytical reading,” but these ideas gave me more of what I’ve already tried with students that isn’t working very well. My first theory was that while “rhetorical analysis” sounds lofty and academic, and “analytical” or “close” reading has a very distinctive meaning to my students as an exercise involving an annotation key, “reading like a writer” sounds more approachable, and indeed useful, to those expected to write.

Different articles that directly addressed this concept provided some interesting definitions of it and rationales for it. For example, an article from *Writer's Digest* encourages that “the more broadly and deeply we read, the more we recognize excellent writing in its endless guises and the more examples we see for how to do it well” (Sambuchino). An English teacher profiled in *Education Weekly* described the process as “reading in layers,” involving one round of reading to make sense of the text and to ask questions, but to re-read and annotate for “elements of the genre and how it works” and “to spot structural decisions the writer made to create meaning” which the students then use in their own writing (Gewertz 12). Something emphasized in both of these pieces is the importance of the reading-writing connection, a component that is rarely encouraged in the language of “rhetorical analysis” or “close reading.”

Though the writing may be missing from such Common-Core-era activities as “close reading,” the Common Core State Standards do implicitly emphasize this connection in how the language of each thread of reading and writing parallel one another. As acclaimed English teacher and research Kelly Gallagher notes on a sample assessment item, “the new standards—and many of the newly adopted tests—require students to weave reading and writing together, and this is a good thing” (65). Gallagher, an advocate of the mentor sentence strategy and modelling writing in general for English students, also emphasizes the value of writing as a tool to support students’ reading. For example, when reading and discussing a piece of literature, he will ask students to write for a few minutes to the topic, boosting comprehension and analysis, and respond to each other’s written thoughts in writing to build multiple perspectives and form more questions for the discussion. Just the introduction of a few minutes writing can greatly impact a student’s level of engagement with the reading and build their capacity for more complex interpretive work (Gallagher 155-156).

By far the most useful resource I found on this topic was an essay published as a chapter in a composition textbook entitled “How to Read Like a Writer.” This piece is intended for college freshmen writers, which is a group comparable to my AP English Language class, and it provides some engaging reading as well as clear insights and examples on how to go about doing the titular task. The author defines the purpose of reading like a writer (RLW) as “to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques

in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing" (Bunn 72). Early on, he makes an interesting analogy to the two ways one might look at an ancient Corinthian column. If one traces the origin and development of the column, we are "reading" it as historians, but if we are "reading" it as an architect, we must know "all about the construction of the building, down to the last nail or peg in the beams...if we are going to put up buildings ourselves" (Bunn 74). In a similar way, reading simply as a reader is a different process than reading as a writer. What is most helpful about Bunn's essay, besides how accessible it is in its entirety for assigning to students entering the class, are the specific guiding questions a reader/writer should ask before, during, and after reading, many of which emphasize the connection between reading and writing as the author assumes students will be incorporating what they notice into their own writing.

### **Conclusion: How I'm going to use this information and what I still want to find out**

The importance of the reading-writing connection cannot be overstated. While most English classrooms require that students write in response to what they read, the higher-level thinking activities required to "read like a writer" and intentionally apply strategies modeled in the reading to their own writing are not emphasized enough, even in the upper grades. While I can certainly attest to this from my own teaching experience and collaboration with other teachers of college-level English, the lack of research and resources in this area that's easily accessible to teachers who are actively looking for it points to an underuse of these strategies.

To solidify my own learning on this topic and to advance my future students' efforts in reading like writers, I have prepared a basic guided reading handout for students, and provided a corresponding model of this activity with the book I am currently reading. These resources follow the Works Cited page of this project.

## Works Cited

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## Reader-Writer's Notebook

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Passage under study (include title, author, pg. #)

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<p>BEFORE READING</p> <p>(write at the top of the text or your notebook )</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you know the author's intended <b>purpose</b> and <b>audience</b> for this piece? If so, what are they?</li> <li>• In what genre is this written?</li> <li>• Is this published writing or student-produced?</li> <li>• Is this the kind of writing you will be assigned to write yourself? If so, when and on what topic?</li> </ul>
<p>AFTER READING</p> <p>(big picture things you should be able to describe)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal for the intended audience? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?</li> <li>• What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims?</li> <li>• How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?</li> <li>• Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What about the writing in those places makes it unclear or confusion?</li> <li>• How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?</li> </ul>
<p>DURING READING</p> <p>(you should be writing or annotating for these things as you read)</p>	<p>You: *notices interesting thing*</p> <p>Also you: *highlights or underlines thing*</p> <p>Still you: *answers the following questions in the margin or in your notebook*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What technique is the author using here?</li> <li>• Is this technique effective?</li> <li>• What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried the same technique in my writing?</li> </ul> <p>REPEAT OFTEN</p>

*These questions are adapted from Bunn, Mike. "How to Read Like a Writer." Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, edited by Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky, vol. 2, Parlor Press, 2011, pp. 71–86.*

## Reader-Writer's Notebook

Name: *Teacher Example* Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Passage under study (include title, author, pg. #) *Shortest Way Home* by Pete Buttigieg, p. 3

<p>BEFORE READING</p> <p>(write at the top of the text or your notebook )</p>	<p>It seems like his larger, broader purpose is to win the Democratic nomination for president next year, but more specifically to introduce himself and give a rationale of his values and plan for America through his memoir. I would also imagine, as a small-city mayor and husband of a public school teacher, at least part of his purpose is to make a paycheck while he's campaigning. The audience of his book feels like people who are not actually from the Midwest, given how descriptive he is South Bend, Indiana and communities like it.</p> <p>This is published writing (because I had to buy it). I will have to write short memoir in AP Language.</p>
<p>AFTER READING</p> <p>(big picture things you should be able to describe)</p>	<p>The language of this book was surprisingly narrative for a political candidate's book. It feels like a good balance of formal and informal, and matches the role of somebody who wants us to imagine that he's "presidential" but also a nice guy.</p> <p>The beginning of this book sets the stage for understanding his home town, and if there's any argument in the initial paragraph it's implied that South Bend is a beautiful place in winter. His evidence is rich description of snow at dawn.</p> <p>The author transitions from description to narration with a number of introductory prepositional phrases, which feels smooth and effective.</p>
<p>DURING READING</p> <p>(you should be writing or annotating for these things as you read)</p>	<p>The opening line of the book, "Dawn comes late here along the western limit of the Eastern Time Zone, so far from the coast that our first sunrise of the year arrives after eight in the morning," creates a strong sense of place. This technique immediately distinguishes Pete from the competition, mostly coastal Democrats, as well as finds a new way of describing "the heartland" of the United States. In some ways, describing how limited the light is in Indiana almost feels like a metaphor.</p> <p>I think that using this "strong sense of place" technique as an opening line in my writing would be useful if the location of my story was essential. If I choose to write about my grandparents' farm it might work, but if I choose to focus on my grandpa himself, it might not make as much sense.</p>

## What Happened to the Civil Rights Movement?

Melissa Galvin iSearch

I have always loved social studies class. It goes back to sixth grade and Mr. Krysiak. He was the best teacher I have ever had. He reminded me of Sherlock Holmes and I loved listening to him teach because he KNEW what he was talking about. He took us OUT of our textbooks. My love for history was reignited in college when I took classes with Dr. Bickford. Again, another amazing teacher who was able to extend our learning past textbooks because he KNEW what he was talking about. I was always interested in the Civil Rights Movement. It pained me to know that there was so much hate in this world when all I try to do is love and understand. Learning about slavery always broke my heart and intrigued me greatly. When I started learning about the Civil Rights Movement and the insane amount of courage that these men and women had, I just fell in love with the movement. It always made me so thankful that I never had to fight for someone to treat me like a human being and equally sad that others have. As I have grown older, I've come to realize that the past repeats itself, and I would love to get more Civil Rights lessons taught in schools because if you look at our society, it truly looks like we are on the path to repeat history again.

When I started researching for this iSearch paper, I was slightly surprised at how much information wasn't readily available. It turns out that you really can't just sit down to Google and ask, "Why is the Civil Rights Movement not taught in schools?" because you'll get a lot of information that is mainly only opinion. So, I took my research, my grande Iced Chai from Starbucks, and my determination with me to none other than our enormous, beautiful, and grand Booth Library. There, I conferred with a man who gave me some excellent resources and taught me some trade secrets. First of all, Booth Library is equipped with some amazing

people called subject librarians. How, after approximately 20 semesters total at EIU, did I not know that there was a thing as a subject librarian? These wondrous creatures are people in possession of gigantic brains that are knowledgeable beyond what seems natural for a human being to be in certain areas. So, I found myself a wonderful woman named Michele and together, we were able to accomplish what seemed to be impossible: wading our way through the opinionated in order to find the research based. While researching, I found that there are different “rooms” that you can search in on the online library and JSTOR is an awesome resource. Following JSTOR you can find other great articles pertaining to your educational searching in a top-secret place. Come a little closer and I’ll tell you. Closer. Closer. *The Keep*. Do. Not. Tell. Anyone. There are so many places to access excellent research-based information. At this time, I currently have articles and have gathered information from SEVENTEEN sources. I’m not kidding. This is legit. I will not be including all seventeen sources for the purpose of this paper, but I do plan to use them as I continue to make my case for why we need to better teach The Civil Rights Movement in schools. I have learned amazing things about master narratives, misrepresentations in literature, and the lack of curriculum in all levels of public education. I have learned about textbooks and how much they lack, trade books and how you can’t trust them, and something called a Critical Race Theory. The most important thing I learned, though, is that racism is still just as strong and lurking everywhere.

I love research. Sure, it's daunting and not always fun. You read until your eyes feel like they're going to pop out of your head and your fingertips get all dry (if you're like me, and you MUST print out your resources because reading on a computer does not allow for the highlighting, underlining, and annotating that you're OCD self has to do), but from it comes

this beautiful treasure trove of information that not everyone knows. You become this secret keeper and it's up to you how you decide to handle this awesome information. I try to spread the love and inform. That, as educators, is what we are called to do. So, when it comes to The Civil Rights Movement and how terribly it is (not) taught, I have to shout it out from the highest rooftop, preferable that of our castle, Old Main.

I learned so much information that I probably could write a thousand papers and still not have uncovered all. So, first let us discuss why we have this atrocious lack of teaching. There are many, many factors but I have boiled it down to Social studies instruction is often limited by outdated textbooks that provide simplistic coverage (Frost, 2012; Loewen, 2007; and Roberts, 2015). Firstly, teachers simply lack the instructional time and are giving social studies curriculum the leftover minutes at the end of the day (SPLC, 2011; Brewer, 2006; Yendol-Hoppey and Tilford, 2004; Lintner, 2006). Secondly, elementary teachers hired to teach social studies often did not major in history; therefore, they may struggle with poorly-developed curriculum (SPLC, 2011; Brewer, 2006; Yendol-Hoppey and Tilford, 2004; Lintner, 2006). Thirdly, states often fail to set high expectations for the teaching of history curriculum (SPLC, 2011; Brewer, 2006; Yendol-Hoppey and Tilford, 2004; Lintner, 2006). It is hard to teach about an entire movement when you don't have time, you're not informed, and you're not expected to.

I learned about this thing called a master narrative and the sanitizing of history. Master narratives are the simplistic narratives that emerge from an incomplete story centered on a singular, iconic leader. Students are unaware of terrible atrocities such as lynching, race riots, and police brutality. Instead, students learn that Rosa Parks was simply tired at the end of her long day, that Malcom X was an extreme radical for his entire life, and

that Dr. Martin Luther King was a saint. While a *portion* of this is true, it is completely sanitized. I also learned that textbooks simply cannot be trusted. Teachers cannot rely on textbooks. For example, the Houghton Mifflin social studies book for fourth grade consists of one single lesson for The Civil Rights Movement (Macmillian McGraw Hill, 2005). Textbooks for K-12 classrooms struggle with consistency as well (Woodson, 2017; Yendol-Hoppey & Tilford, 2004).

I also found the most awesome and amazing little tool called the C3 Framework. The C3 framework is about inquiry, or positioning students to ask and answer complex questions using diverse texts and disciplinary literacy, to be informed citizens (CCSSO, 2012). The C3 framework is organized into four dimensions: developing questions and planning inquiries; applying disciplinary tools and concepts; evaluating sources and using evidence; and communicating conclusions and taking informed actions.

Dimension One is all about inquiry- both teacher and student-based questioning. This is an important place to start because all student learning stems back to questioning. There are two types of questions- compelling and supporting. Compelling questions will focus on an inquiry that requires a student to form an argumentative response. Supporting questions that allow students to construct explanations that show understanding. The main goal during dimension one, is allowing students to graduate from teacher given inquiries to student led inquiries (NCSS 2013;NGA & CCSSO, 2010; CCSSO, 2012). Dimension Two can be seen as the backbone of dimension one. This is where the content for the aforementioned inquiries is determined. Students will immediately begin to answer inquiries based on their own experiences, dimension two is about getting students to investigate their inquiries deeply with disciplinary and often multidisciplinary content. Dimension Three is about evaluating sources and using evidence.

Students will learn how to gather reputable sources as evidence to ground their written and oral based arguments in. This dimension will help students seek out many rich sources, and eventually be able to argue both sides of an inquiry with source work alone. Students will be able to take the sources they find and analyze those sources to form their own conclusion that is evidence based. Dimension Four is about communicating conclusions and taking informed action based upon those conclusions. Students should be able to communicate their findings in many ways orally and in writing. Students also need a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge, ranging from individual assignments to small group and whole group discussions, and many other opportunities in between. Students should be able to read closely, think critically, and write convincingly (NCSS 2013; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; CCSSO, 2012).

The research for this has been beyond intriguing. I have found treasure troves of information, and I'm still not satisfied. I really loved the C3 framework and how it really broke down what students should be capable of. If I know where my students need to be, I can come up with the curriculum to get them there. I also really love how it is a scaffolded and guided practice, where it is heavily guided in the younger grades with the expectation that students will be self-sustaining and fluent by high school graduation. I want to keep studying and keep researching.

History has proved that history repeats itself. It is not a fun fact that we enjoy knowing. It is something that rests on our shoulders and consciences every day. But, as adults, humans, and educators especially, it is our duty to make sure that we are helping raise and bring up excellent citizens. This includes making sure they know the good, bad, and the ugly, so to speak. Because of this, we have to make it our concern and our responsibility to teach the parts of history that are not so wonderful to remember.

I plan to include The Civil Rights Movement into my ELA curriculum. The CCSS expect 80% of students' reading to be from nonfiction sources. I will be able to get my students to that 80% by allowing them to research and work through The Civil Rights Movement. I'm also going to pull in the information I have learned thus far (and will continue to learn). I will not let my students continue to be uninformed or misled on such an important topic.

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### Digital Writing and its Place in my Curriculum

“If we want to do better things for students, we have to become the guinea pigs and immerse ourselves in new learning opportunities to understand how to create the necessary changes. We rarely create something different until we experience something different”

(Couros).

Learning new technology is difficult for me. Thankfully, I have a husband, a son, and a tech at school who kindly walk me through what I need to know. My husband and son have figured out over the years that it is a more efficient use of their time to set up my new devices for me and show me what I need to know to use them. Our tech explains how the devices work, and I can't lie, I think I must get that eye-glazed-over look that I sometimes see in my own students. I really do try to understand the devices that I use, but it is a struggle. I bought an Apple watch, so I would have data when I run. The watch arrived via UPS when my husband was on a fishing trip, and my son was at work. I spent an entire day on the floor of my family room with my iPad, my iPhone, and my new watch strewn across the floor in front of me while I tried to sync up my information. At times, I cried when my frustration got the best of me. But, after many hours, my three devices synced. When my husband returned home and asked to see my work, he very quickly made several alterations to my watch set-up that greatly simplified my life.

My issues with technology date back many years. The TV-VCR/DVD cart has also acted as a nemesis for me and still causes me anxiety. I taught one young man for three years in a row.

He failed English 3 twice due to many extenuating circumstances. As I struggled to get a movie to play for his class, he said to me, “See, Mrs. Gray - if I passed, who’d run your movies for you?” I’ve learned to laugh at my mishaps and have let the students know that it is absolutely okay for them to laugh with me. They are kind and help me out if I get really stuck. But, as their teacher, I want to feel more confident in my use and understanding of technology so that I can make their learning experience more enjoyable and relevant to 21st learning expectations.

One year as I was struggling with the number of changes I wanted to incorporate into my curriculum, my principal gave me sound advice. She suggested that I focus on one or two changes to begin with, evaluate how those were working, and then begin incorporating the others. Because of my complicated relationship with technology, I have felt a reluctance to incorporate these “new-fangled” apps and activities into my curriculum. But, after reading *Crafting Digital Writing* by Tony Hicks, I am dedicated to incorporating opportunities for my students to write digitally. In the foreword, Christopher Lehman states “...for students technology can be the invitation to dive deeply into writing craft” (ix). I believe the benefits for my students far outweigh any discomfort I might feel. This year, my students will write and submit their work for the first time using the Turnitin.com website. I look forward to this opportunity first and foremost for promoting academic integrity and honesty, helping students understand and recognize plagiarism. From what I understand, there are options for students to use a grammar component and complete peer editing assignments. There is also an opportunity for teachers to digitally assess and offer feedback. Following is my exploration of digital writing activities that I intend to incorporate as well as ideas for assessing digitally.

Sharon J. Washington, of the National Writing Project said in 2010, “Today's young people are using a range of digital tools to compose and create in new and exciting ways... It is a

game-changing moment for teachers of writing. The very notion of what it means to write is shifting, and educators are faced with adapting their teaching practices to integrate new technologies while redefining writing and learning for the 21st century” (“What is Digital Writing”). One of the first examples of digital writing that I would like to introduce to my students is blogging with EduBlogger. EduBlogger allows me to set up classrooms and review my students writing. The skills projected to be required of our students in the workforce continue to change to incorporate more creative, analytical, and critical thinking. Below is an infographic from the World Economic Forum that Kathleen Morris included on EduBlogger that compares growing and declining skills:

Skills growing in prominence include analytical thinking and active learning as well as skills such as technology design, highlighting the growing demand for various forms of technology competency. However, proficiency in new technologies is only one part of the 2022 skills equation. “Human” skills such as creativity, originality and initiative, critical thinking, persuasion and negotiation will likewise retain or increase their value, as will attention to detail, resilience, flexibility and complex problem-solving. Emotional intelligence, leadership and social influence as well as service orientation are also set to see particular increase in demand relative to their current prominence today.

These changes should inform our instruction. As educators, we must recognize these shifts in demands and continue to review our curriculum to ensure that it is preparing our students to meet the new and changing demands in the work force.

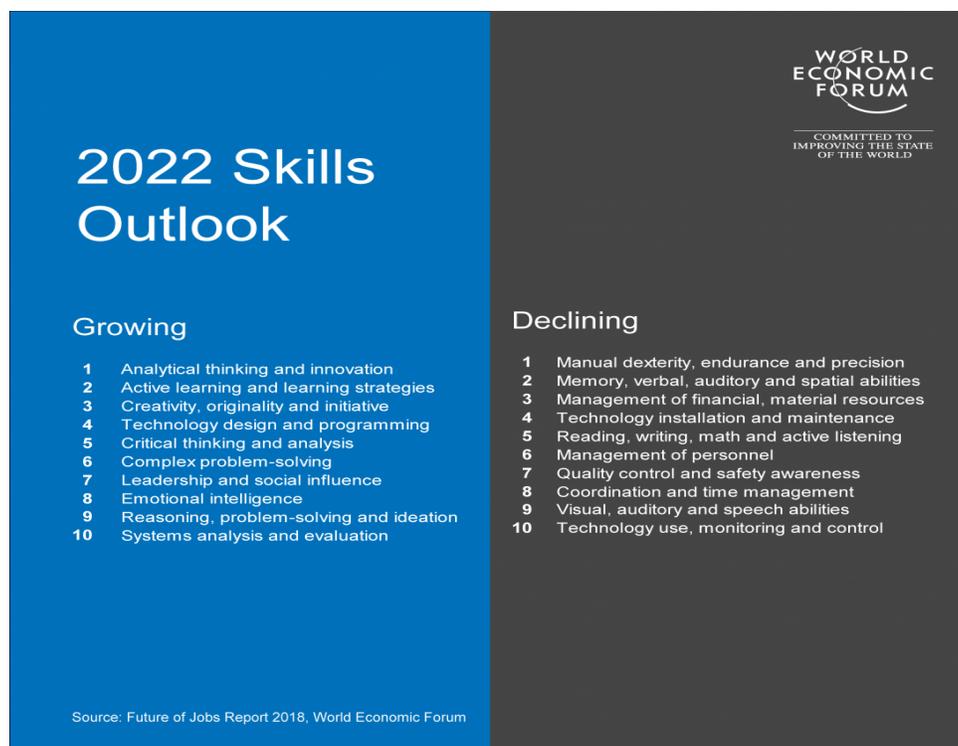


Image: World Economic Forum

Initially, as I become more familiar with and comfortable with my students blogging, I plan to use ideas from “100 Days of Summer Writing,” but as we move throughout the year, I would like to find infographics, images, and videos that tie directly into our current unit of study. The benefits of blogging include opportunities for student reflection. Often times in a classroom setting, students are given information but are not given time to reflect upon it, how it relates to their lives, how it ties to other lessons or other things they’ve learned. Blogging offers students the opportunity to engage in collaborate, more real-world activities which by default provides opportunities for them to develop their voice and learn audience.

Our school utilizes Chromebooks and Google’s platform, so my students often use Slides for presentations. In the past, their presentations, with the exception of a few students, have been lackluster at best. Students create slides that contain most of what they intend to say to the class and consequently read their slides. This year, prior to our first presentation, I intend to have

students evaluate mentor texts (YouTube, Ted Talks, etc.) for effectiveness. Troy Hicks shares Robin Williams suggestions for design referred to as the CRAP principles: contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity (34) that I would like to share with my students. I am realizing that educators have high expectations for their students' work but too often assume the students already possess the skills to accomplish the tasks when, in fact, they've never been taught. It will serve my students and me well to take instruction time to teach these skills that will grow their understanding of what quality presentations include and enable them to produce the work my colleagues and I expect and demand. I intend to present this as a collaborative venture with our business instructor and our director of technology.

I feel especially challenged as I try to follow the sage advice of incorporating two-to-three changes at a time as to not be overwhelmed, I still have three additional changes that I would like to make and feel compelled to include. The first is using the web-tool [hypothes.is.com](http://hypothes.is.com) to teach my students to annotate digitally. This has multiple benefits as it can be used across the curriculum. My colleague and I are incorporating Kelly Gallagher's Article of the Week. While we will begin by printing off the articles and helping students learn to navigate through them on paper. As students become more adept at reading, understanding, and being able to write about the articles, we can begin shifting their reading and annotating to be completed digitally. Sarah Gross, an English Teacher at High Technology High School shared this about her use of [hypothes.is](http://hypothes.is): "I love that [hypothes.is](http://hypothes.is) allows my students to contribute to the conversation whether they are frequent class participants or the type that like to sit back and think before responding. I can't call on every student but by annotating together we can all join in the conversation." Every year, I have students who sit quietly at their desks, and while I know they have ideas to share, they hesitate to share in a whole class setting, yet, when provided a

small group setting, they open up with their observations. This will allow them more opportunities to “weigh-in” on topics. It also supports my earlier observation that students need time to reflect on the material. Hypothes.is allows students time to read, reflect, and share their annotations. This website allows groups to be established, so cross-curricular assignments can be more easily accessed by all involved.

This leads to and ties to my next change to my curriculum which is including more opportunities for students to study argument via digital formats. Argument is difficult for my students to comprehend at the most basic level, the idea that an argument does not have to involve anger and hurtful words spewed from one directed at another. Social media seems like a logical tool to begin looking at argument as so many of the posts I read contain unlimited logical fallacies. I also intend to use infographics, images, and videos to investigate and formulate arguments. When I think of cross-curricular opportunities, I like the idea of using an example like that found on pages 65 and 66 of *Teaching Adolescents to Read and Write Digital Texts: Argument in the Real World*. This particular example of the “sitting epidemic” would lend itself to collaboration with our P.E./Health and Wellness class. For example, students could explore the health hazards of sitting for extended periods of time and then examine the argument set forth in the infographic.

So far, these changes are my intended changes for my classroom going forward. This final change is one that will, without question, occur, as I was the teacher who pushed for our school’s use of Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com is a web-based service that will allow my colleagues and me to “accelerate feedback..., prevent plagiarism..., build information literacy skills..., promote creative and critical thinking” (*Turnitin.com*). It also provides students with a revision assistant option. I am quite excited for this because as it stands now, I know students are

plagiarizing their writing, but I cannot find the original through a Google search that is not only time consuming but also terribly frustrating. I do not believe that most of our students plagiarize with intent; however, I believe it is their inexperience that promotes this. The addition of Turnitin.com allows my colleagues and me to focus on the writing itself. It also provides opportunities for students to take greater ownership of their writing through the various revision opportunities. While Turnitin.com detects plagiarism, it is also a teaching tool for both our students and my colleagues who before may have been reluctant to assign writing because of the grammar aspect. This also holds my colleagues accountable for the writing they assign. They, too, must take academic integrity seriously and convey this to our students.

Turnitin.com provides me with the last change to my curriculum that I plan to incorporate this next year, and that change is a shift to digital assessment. I do not intend to solely grade digitally, but I do intend to use the assessment function with Turnitin.com. The feedback feature provides “Drag-and-drop QuickMarks, text and voice comments, and automatic grammar checking provides personalized and actionable feedback to students” (*Turnitin.com*). There are online rubrics that I can complete and share digitally with my students that streamline the process of assessment which translates to more immediate feedback for their writing.

I am excited about the changes I intend to incorporate into my curriculum next year. There are more digital activities offered by Troy Hicks that I would like to incorporate going forward, and I would like to collaborate with our Director of Technology and our business instructor to provide professional development to our faculty. As I was reading through the texts for this class and this paper, I scanned the QR codes for the first time ever. I should email Heinemann as several of them don't work, and I, at first, thought it was user error on my part, but my son assured me “I was doing it right” when he checked with his phone. Regarding the

inclusion of digital writing into our classrooms, Troy Hicks states: “Yet it is clear that student writers in the twenty-first century are doing much more than alphabetic print on paper; they are increasingly exploring images, videos, slideshows, wikis, podcasts, digital stories, and other types of digital writing that allow them to share their work beyond their classroom wall with other students, their parents, and the broader audiences the Internet allows” (2). As educators, we must embrace these changes, or sadly, we hinder our students and their ability to compete on a global level. The skills that they will need to possess to be considered marketable in the year 2022 demand that as educators, we change how we teach reading and writing and embrace the opportunities that digital texts offer.

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### The Purpose of Asking and Answering the WAYA Question

#### **Introduction:**

“What are you assessing,” or WAYA research stems from a question that a co-worker uses against me periodically. Occasionally in conversation as I explained an assignment or activity that I was planning on using in my classroom, my co-worker would ask, “So, what are you assessing?” If I could answer the question, I usually went through with the activity or assignment I had originally planned. However, if I found myself struggling to target exactly what it was that I was assessing, I would alter the lesson or completely cut it from my agenda. I found that many of the activities or assignments I would like to use—or have seen teachers use in the past—are not always assessing students correctly. Sometimes, the assignments that instructors use as teaching “strategies” are not actually directing students towards an ultimate academic or intellectual goal. After realizing the value of the question and seeing its use in my own classroom planning, I began to use it against my co-worker to keep his curriculum focused as well. The WAYA question provides a much-needed reality check in the midst of a crazy school year. A WAYA mindset keeps aligns and guides both teacher preparation and instruction.

The role of this question had further impact on my teaching after the 2018-2019 school year. Having taught the highest level of seniors and the lowest level of freshmen, I began to view my freshmen curriculum differently. Firsthand, I was able to see where the direction of my freshmen’s skill development needed to go before students took an AP English or dual credit

course. My short-term perspective changed dramatically because I was able to teach both ends of the English curriculum spectrum. The “What are you assessing?” question allowed me to re-focus my planning in a purposeful way; I began redirecting my lessons towards long-term goals in a purposeful way. Although my realization was not a new educational theory, I began to see significant importance in that the ultimate assessment should reflect the skills students have acquired. Like I said, WAYA questioning does not stem from new educational theories. It is a technique that can be used to self-evaluate instructional preparation.

I already saw existing value in asking and answering the WAYA question, without having researched any existing theories behind it. Due to this previous enlightenment, I decided to plan my I-Search around this personalized theory. I knew that within the topic of assessment, I would find daunting vagueness in seeking answers. The only way around such a widespread window of research was to break down each part of the question. Ultimately, I wanted to find real theory to ensure that the WAYA question fulfilled its purpose in leading teachers and students throughout the school year.

### **Description of Search:**

The search for answers began with an in-depth understanding of the question. Although it sounded like a simple question, the hunt for information was much more daunting. The *what* portion of the WAYA question encompasses the result of the actual material (worksheet, activity, lecture, quiz, writing assignment, speech, etc.) being used in the classroom. Everything done in the classroom should be directing students towards an ultimate assessment. The *assessment* portion of the question was intended to encompass a summative assessment at the end of a unit, semester, and/or school year.

Due to the depth of the topic, I began my research with two focal questions to accompany the overall WAYA inquiry: (a) How can teachers be sure that their class material reflects the intended assessment goals; and (b) What is the goal of assessment. I was not exactly sure what information I would find, but I remained hopeful that past or contemporary articles and journals would advance my understanding of the WAYA question and attack to pursuing it throughout the school year.

An article titled “Assessing Student Learning” published by Stanford is where I began. The resource discussed the idea that changing the way a teacher assesses student learning could greatly improve the teacher’s effectiveness (“Assessing Student Learning”). Although a brief document, the author listed advice and techniques for ensuring the use of assessment that required students to evaluate their learning in front of the teacher. If a teacher attempted to answer the WAYA question, the leaning process should take an open window approach. Both the student and teacher need to see a reflection of student thought and comprehension throughout the assigned activity. In reference to a student evaluation assignment, the article argues that, “teachers can gain a sense of how well students use their time and whether students’ learning skills are developed sufficiently to handle the course load. Students become much more aware of their habits regarding study time and this awareness usually encourages them to use their study time more effectively” (“Assessing Student Learning”). The idea of student self-reflection is two-fold in attaining both formative assessment and purposeful learning.

Furthering the discussion of formative assessment, I looked closer at the three main types of assessment. WAYA questioning essentially targets a summative assessment; however, to reach successful skill development before summative assessment, formative assessment is needed. Matthew Lynch, author of “The Real Purpose of Assessments in Education” explained

that “The purpose of assessment is to gather relevant information about student performance or progress, or to determine student interests to make judgments about their learning process. After receiving this information, teachers can reflect on each student’s level of achievement, as well as on specific inclinations of the group, to customize their teaching plans” (Lynch). If formative assessment was not used to help direct WAYA questioning, teachers would often fall off track when trying to keep their lessons scaffolded and purposeful.

Much of my research reiterated the idea of teacher formative assessment and student reflection in regards to successfully “assessing” student learning. In the joint publication of “The Three-Fold Benefit of Reflective Writing: Improving Program Assessment, Student Learning, and Faculty Professional Development” by Elizabeth Allan and Dana Lynn Driscoll, a stress of teaching is highlighted through the use of student reflection as a way to direct assessment. The journal explains that “Reflection is one way to bridge the divide between thought and action—an opportunity for students to describe their internal processes, evaluate their challenges, and recognize their triumphs in ways that would otherwise remain unarticulated” (Allan and Driscoll 37). Unlike formative assessment, student reflection actively seeks students’ participation in evaluating their own skill development and learning process for teacher to see and use directing towards assessment. In the classroom, the WAYA question must be checked periodically by student reflection—alongside formative assessment—the two are intertwined.

Continuing through various subcategories branching from my two research questions, I also wanted to work through my own assumptions of what the “end goal” should be throughout a student’s educational career. Allan and Driscoll continue their discussion with guidance of assessment: “A primary purpose of education is for students to adapt knowledge from their immediate learning context to personal, professional, educational and civic contexts... We see

reflection as a key component in that process” (38). Student reflection throughout class material, lessons, lectures, and activities is extremely useful in teaching with a WAYA perspective.

Another interesting aspect to my research was when I turned to “Assessing Writing for Workplace Purposes,” an unpublished journal (to be published in 2020) addressing questions of the goal to assessment. The document noted questions such as “How appropriate are current standards for determining writing readiness for the workplace and/or how or by whom should such standards be determined? How can validity be established for assessments of writing for the workplace? How are the written communication practices of specific workplaces and occupations changing? How can or should language assessment practices adapt to these changes?” (Knoch, et al.). Although I was not given answers in this search, this unfinished document—and other brief readings—made it clear that the end goal to assessment is more than high-stake test readiness, or even college readiness. A professional aspect of career readiness is most definitely part of an assessment end goal focal point. Each piece of assessment contributes to the WAYA question. I will be reading this journal upon release.

### **Search Findings:**

Although the search to finalize answers in perfecting the WAYA technique within the classroom is not finished, I was able to draw significant conclusions. The WAYA inquiry directs teachers to answer the WAYA question throughout their planning and preparation during a school year. To successfully work in a direction towards the WAYA perspective, teachers must make good use of diagnostic and formative assessment in the classroom. There must be continuous movement towards the end goals since WAYA targets a summative assessment. I have found that teachers would be more likely to stick to the WAYA question when formative assessment and student reflection is used consistently throughout the school year. If teachers

stray away from formative assessment, it will be easier to lose sight of the answer to WAYA. The WAYA mindset encourages scaffolding and “the understanding of teaching as a formative process that evolves over time with feedback and input from students” (Lynch). WAYA also targets the outcome of “customized” material used within the classroom (worksheet, activity, lecture, assignment, quiz, essay, etc.) and its value in direction towards ultimate skill development and summative assessment. Once again, everything done in the classroom should be directing students towards an ultimate assessment.

WAYA primary goals are to achieve academic and intellectual skill development throughout the learning process of achieving college readiness leading towards workplace preparation and success. WAYA question direction must also be checked periodically with student reflection as a way of actively seeking self-evaluation throughout the learning process. Student reflection allows the WAYA question to remain accurate and true to student needs while creating purpose in individualized and whole-group learning. If throughout the school year a teacher is consistently working towards assessment but has no understanding of personalized student articulation of the learning process, the advancement towards accurately assessing may be lost.

**Conclusion:**

Since the WAYA questioning process seems mechanical and exists with a sole purpose (the assessment), instructors would possibly turn away from this classroom technique. I would like to get an even better wrap on a “how to” process from a sample classroom. With a better ability to demonstrate success of the technique, more teachers would use it. I want to see this process played out from the beginning of a school year until the end. I would like to see an increase in student skill development and student focus. If everything has a reason in the

classroom and learning is purposeful, students will notice, appreciate it, and work harder. While WAYA questioning puts more emphasis on whole-group learning, I would also like to find proof that the perspective is just as individualized as whole-group.

In my own teaching, I would like to emphasize alternative assessment while still incorporating skill set direction towards an end goal. Maybe after further investigation and a thorough year of WAYA research reflecting in my own classroom, I would be open to presenting these ideas and findings. I will continue to ask myself and my co-workers “What are you assessing?” to keep them on track towards classroom success. Ideally, I want my department to become and stay effective teachers. I want us to cognitively notice assessment direction within our own classrooms. Lastly, I would like to instill WAYA as a way of prepping and teaching, not simply thinking.

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### Effective Feedback: When, Where, How?

If you ever happen to roam the halls of Richland County High School when the students are present and ask some of the juniors or seniors about the teacher of the Senior English course, you would probably find out that I have quite the reputation. Even though most of the comments cannot be stated here, the just of the matter is that I am known as a fairly tough grader who has very high expectations of students. Any student who writes an essay for me knows that my evaluation of the work will come with various marks and comments that will then culminate onto an elaborate rubric that identifies the final grade for the completed piece. This is a scary process for the students because, in most cases, they have never experienced so much negative (as they see it) feedback on their writing and have little knowledge of what it takes to actually write an essay. What those students do not know is that the time needed to assess the work and provide the comments is extensive, and it is often wasted as many of the marks are never read or considered. Additionally, the individuals who pass through the door of my room do not realize that I am a self-taught assessor; I have never had a course or a professor who explained to me the right way to provide feedback on student writing. Therefore, the last eight years as an educator has been a whirlwind of a trial-and-error process to finding the most effective way to assess student writing and provide valuable feedback. I hope that continued research will improve not only my knowledge of marking student writing but also help my students become better writers because of my efforts.

Before I started my research, I spent some time trying to think about my own feelings toward providing student feedback and the methods I have used in the past. I thought back to the two previous years that I have taught the dual credit courses at my current location. Those courses were some of the most challenging of my career due to my methods of assessing student work. In eighteen weeks, my students are required to write nine essays, which equates to an essay being submitted about every two weeks. This means that I was spending the time between submissions frantically marking anywhere between 80-90 student essays. My feedback methods included making numerous comments on every page of the work in an effort to account for the grade that the student had been given. This process does not seem to be effective because it takes too much time, and the students are already in the middle (or at the end) of writing the next essay before I have been able to return the previous work. Therefore, they are not able to make improvements on their writing because they have not seen where they fell short on the previous essay. Not only was this process detrimental to the work of the students but it also has left me feeling deflated and overwhelmed.

With these thoughts in mind, I knew what I no longer wanted to do in regards to feedback and could begin researching more effective approaches. My first thought was to speak to one of my colleagues, Christina VanMatre, who taught the course the ten years prior to my coming into the district. I was hoping that she would have some advice about reducing the workload or some input on the best feedback practices. Unfortunately, she used many of the same methods. In our discussion, she admitted to having many of the same feelings while teaching the class and stated that she did not really know where to start with my research.

My next instinct was to access an online database to see what articles existed on the topic. I opted to use EBSCO because of the wide range of journals available. What I found in my

initial search was somewhat disappointing because it did not yield many results. The first phrase that I typed into the search bar was “providing feedback on student writing.” Only forty-one articles were found, and the majority of those articles were about college writing or writing in other countries. One article that I encountered was entitled “Understanding the Gap between High School and College Writing” by Cheryl Beil and Melinda Knight. When I first skimmed this article to see if it was going to be relevant to my search, I saw a few sections that seemed to highlight what students were experiencing in high school writing. While it did mention what types of essays students were writing, it did not really mention much about the feedback to that writing. From there, I realized that I needed to try to find a more specific search. I tried searching feedback and high school writing practices and was excited to see that more relevant resources had been found. However, many of those journal articles were not able to be accessed through the database, which was quite discouraging. The titles of the articles I saw but could not access got me thinking about what types of answers I was hoping to find. This led me to trying to determine some questions that might help me with my search. After some brainstorming, I was able to come up with a short list. At what point in the writing process is it most pertinent to provide feedback? Does it make more sense to provide comments while students are drafting or after submission? If it does make more sense to provide comments while the drafting is occurring, how can feedback be provided in a way that does not provide too much help or information to the student? What types of markings do students prefer to receive and why? These questions then became the driving forces of my search.

Once I had found several articles on the topics I was researching, I began to comb through them looking for some answers. The first article that really piqued my interest was written by a Caitlin Tucker, a high school English teacher in Sonoma County, California. She

detailed a class period in which she used Google Documents to add feedback on students' works as they were drafting the essays. Her comments included not only grammatical errors but also more complex items such as weak thesis statements or improperly formatted paragraphs. Through this process, she came to the realization that she "needed to put 90 percent of [her] effort and time into the process and 10 percent into the product" (Tucker 85). While Tucker admits that the practice of spending a full class block (90 minutes) reading through essays and providing constants feedback was exhausting, she feels as if it is an ample opportunity to help students learn to write. Overall, Tucker suggests that "assigning an essay to be completed at home and then graded in isolation is a missed opportunity," and that "the students miss out on valuable feedback and support as they write" (85). The information provided in this source, while insightful and helpful, led me to the next question that I had been considering in terms of how much feedback was adequate.

Unfortunately, I was unable to find a source that answered the question of how much is too much. The search for the answer did help me to find a source that began to outline the importance of the practice. Boling and Beatty conducted a study that hinged on the idea of using technology to increase the amount of feedback that students receive which would then, hopefully, increase the amount of learning that takes place. Their initial research suggested many of the ideas that I am researching: "feedback [that] is crucial for improving learning ... can positively impact student achievement and enhance motivation," even though it "does not occur nearly enough" (Boling & Beatty 48). Also, they highlight another problem that I am facing when it comes to the feedback that is being providing. Boling and Beatty discuss the issue of assessing students after a unit is complete and suggest that this type of marking "limited and of minimal use for future learning" (48). One part of the study was to determine whether or not

students would make revisions to assignments if comments were made by classmates or the instructor. The results determined that “there was evidence that students made revisions to their papers based on the feedback that they received” (Boling & Beatty 54). Aside from supporting the idea that feedback throughout the writing process is crucial to improving student writing, the article also began to help me find out which types of comments were helpful. Later, I spent some time reading through an article that I had hoped would provide me with some concrete strategies for classroom use. Lachner, Backfisch, and Nückles’s article “Does Accuracy Matter? Accurate Concept Map Feedback Helps Students Improve the Cohesion of Their Explanations” started out with some great information about the importance of feedback and even made mention of the possibility of using computer programs to alleviate some of the teacher strain (1052-1053). However, when I got into the study they conducted and began to read the results, I realized that the article was not going to give me the examples of feedback types that I was hoping to find, which caused me to abandon my work with the selection. That roadblock of the search caused me to begin looking at other areas of feedback.

Even though I have always felt as if my comments should be useful to students, another one of the questions I was hoping to answer in my research was which types were most beneficial. The Boling and Beatty article suggests that much of the feedback that is typically given to students “can express a positive (or negative) evaluation of the student, yet provide little information on the self-regulation, engagement, and processes that are needed” because it consists of statements such as “great effort” or “nice try” (60). These types of comments are not effective because they divert from the writing itself. While the positive comments provided by students and teachers can improve a writer’s confidence, the statements do not necessarily help individuals to become better writers (Boling & Beatty 60). Even though there seemed to be

information regarding what not to do when providing feedback, this article did not really indicate examples of comments or markings that would be more effective when working with student writing.

With the questions of when and what somewhat answered through the articles, I was still hoping to find some advice concerning the best methods for delving out comments, whether it be in the form of writing on essays or technology-driven notes. Tucker's article seemed to be an advocate of using technology such as Google Documents to provide instant feedback during the writing process. Also, Boling and Beatty's research indicated that technology could be a viable way "to increase the quantity and quality of feedback that students both give and receive" (61). In an effort to try to find some more concrete research on using technology to make notes, I came across an article that seemed to have a negative attitude toward the practice: "Student Preferences for Teacher and Computer Composition Marking" by Dwyer and Sullivan. The results of their study seemed to suggest that students did not like technology when it came to providing feedback. Unfortunately, after reading through the article a little closer, I realized that the article was written in 1993, and it was focusing on computer programs that assessed student work, not teachers using computers to make comments. Even though both articles that addressed the topic seem to like the idea of using computers to provide comments, I am not sure how I feel about eliminating my handwritten feedback. Plus, I am still trying to think of ways to reduce the amount of time it takes to provide the instant feedback both authors are supporting.

One possible answer to the time issue could be the use of peer review for more feedback throughout the writing process. It was always my belief that peer reviews would be an adequate way of helping the students receive comments while reducing my own workload. Unfortunately, my research led to some differing opinions on the method. There are a few negatives to allowing

other students to review the work of their peers. One article indicated that many students “experience anxiety in sharing their writing because they are afraid of being wrong or rejected by their peers” and are apt to not provide necessary negative comments (Boling & Beatty 60). There is also the issue of quality of the commenting; it is suggested that “pupils are not always deemed appropriate assessors” because teachers are able to use “experience and skills that are not available to pupils” (Gielen, et al. 144). Additionally, both articles point out the need for ample instruction and modeling from the teacher to make the feedback from peers as valuable as it needs to be (Boling & Beatty, Gielen, et al.). However, another article indicated numerous positives of peer review in that it creates some “social pressure” for students to excel, can be more understood because students are at the same level, is quicker, and increases how much feedback students receive (Gielen, et al. 145). The study published in 2010 concluded that there was “no significant difference in students’ progress on essay marks between students who worked with substitutional peer feedback on writing assignments for a semester and students in the control group who worked with teacher feedback” (Gielen, et al. 157). This means that their data suggests that “peer feedback can substitute teacher feedback” (Gielen 157). Therefore, this article me somewhat confused on the topic of peer review because I like the idea of being able to put some of the responsibility of providing feedback on my students, but I am concerned as to whether or not I would have the time to teach students how to mark effectively.

To be honest, all of this research has left me feeling a bit ambivalent. While I set out looking for some possible suggestions for feedback marks and approaches, I was unable to fulfill that desire. I did leave the research with an idea that I would like to try to implement in the upcoming school year. The idea that Tucker presented about real-time commenting in Google Documents is something that would be a real possibility for my class. I have been considering

the idea of having workshop days in my dual credit course, and these days would be perfect for that activity. I am still unsure of how much commenting is too much, so I plan to continue with this research in the coming year in order to try to find an answer to that question. As for the continued use of peer review, I do believe that I will leave this in my curriculum, but I have decided that I need to spend more time modeling the types of feedback that need to occur in order for the reviews to be more beneficial to students. I am hoping that by spending more time with feedback throughout the writing process and less time working with the essays after the final draft has been submitted, I can make my courses less stressful on everyone. Therefore, my goal is that my reputation for having high expectations of my students will remain but that the fear and anxiety my students feel for the writing process will dwindle.

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ENG 5585- Writing Institute 08 July 2019

### I-Search....But Did I-Find?

This I-Search essay has been through quite the evolution; when I first thought about the topic I was interested in exploring, I started thinking about the biggest problems that my students have with writing. After mulling over a few ideas, I thought about my biggest frustration in teaching writing; what is the one issue that I am, time and time again, seeing that my students have still not grasped. The answer became clear: incorporating context in quoted evidence. I have tried numerous outlines, scaffolding techniques, paragraph activities, sample student writing, modeling, you name it. However, from the start of the year to the end, I still have students who do not understand how to include context in their quoted evidence, or even what context is, for that matter. And so, with this realization, my essay topic was born. The problem now was, if I was going to use this as my essay topic, that I wasn't quite sure how to start looking for research. Not all of my students that have difficulty with this skill have the same misunderstanding of incorporating context; some students don't use context correctly, others don't incorporate enough of it or don't include it at all. This thought was a little bit overwhelming to me because I realized that I would have to do a heavy amount of research in order to be able to find best practices to address each of these issues. After getting some recommendations about resources that could help me get started, I went to work to learn more about the best way to teach, scaffold, model, and reinforce this skill to my students in the hopes that when I apply these strategies in my classroom next year, I will see some improvement in my students' ability to appropriately integrate context in their evidence when writing an essay.

As I began my research, the first source I filtered through was the National Writing Project website. I started to search for a variety of different terms that I thought might lead me to some sources that identified best practices in teaching context integration and evidence in an academic writing assignment. To my disappointment, I wasn't really finding anything related to what I was specifically looking for. After several different searches though, I stumbled upon a book review posted on the NWP website for a text called, *The Write to Read: Response Journals That Increase Comprehension*. In this review, reviewer Art Peterson describes the text itself and makes note of several findings that writer Lesley Roessing, former educator of 30 years and current director of the Coastal Savannah Writing Project in Georgia, highlights in her research. Peterson summarizes the Roessing had learned that, "reading needs to be a creative process for the reader, not a list of points that the teacher must cover" (Peterson). Reading this succinct expression of teaching literature really struck me because I do feel that I have an internal list of elements that I feel I must bring to my students' attention, rather than providing enough opportunities for my students to discover these things themselves. Why is it that I am in total control of their reading experience? Perhaps I am forcing my reading experience onto them and this is why they have a harder time creating their own interpretations of the story.

Roessing then suggests that providing students with creative opportunities to discover the important elements of a text through independent reading can be a useful strategy. Peterson mentions in his review that Roessing provided her students with activities like, "introducing her students to the double-entry journal, Roessing eschews the common major headings 'Text' and 'Response' and substitutes 'From the BOOK,' 'From your BRAIN.' Teaching the art of questioning essential to reader response..." (Peterson). Through this method, Roessing taught her students how to engage in a literary analysis activity through their use of an independent reading

book before a novel that the entire class read together. By introducing and reinforcing these skills with a book students get to choose for themselves, they are able to be more engaged in the comprehension process and are able to better understand and build their reading skills before reading a text that possibly provides them with more of a challenge. By focusing more specifically on teaching my students to annotate and journal when reading a book of their choice, they will have a better understanding of how to use this annotation strategy when reading a novel during class. Hopefully, this will translate to a better comprehension of that novel and a higher ability to properly understand the context that they need to integrate.

Another strategy that Peterson highlights in his review of Roessing's book is her teaching of found poems to her students. He details, "She introduces students to writing poems with two voices in which, in parallel columns, they contrast the character and experience of two characters. She has them write an 'I am' poem, for which she provides sentences stems as a way to analyze a character" (Peterson). Using a creative writing strategy to give students the ability to better understand a character from a text and create a type of character analysis was absolutely genius to me; so often, I will have my students complete a character analysis where they track a character's development throughout the story through a formal, academic essay. However, after reading how Roessing uses this creative writing strategy in order for her to assess her students' understanding of the text, I can see that this strategy is providing students an opportunity to engage in the same type of character analysis skill, just in a more engaging and interactive way. This strategy can be used to scaffold those reading and writing skills and allow students to build on them when writing a more formal, academic essay. After finding this source, I feel a little bit more confident with my research direction, and I believe my research is positively developing; however, this makes me wonder what else is out there. What other strategies can I find that could

help to develop these writing skills for my students in a way that is more meaningful to them and their understanding of context integration, creative or otherwise?

As I began to switch gears to explore more of these ideas, I changed my focus from the National Writing Project to searching for more creative writing strategies that could help with reading comprehension and literary analysis. I happened to find an article referencing a "Reading to Write" strategy that essentially helps students with more structured reading skills and strategies in order to be able to write about a certain topic. This peaked my interest immediately because I had just left a source that evaluated a text called *The Write to Read*, so I was curious to see what this strategy was about.. I was certainly open to researching different sides of my topic, but I thought that this source might have been contradicting the source I had just found and really liked. However, this study, called "Exploring the Cognition of Reading-to-Write", from the book *Reading to Write: Exploring Cognitive and Social Process*, was researched and written by several professors including Victoria Stein, who was an English professor at Carnegie Mellon at the time. I had to admit that I was a bit skeptical of this source because it was published almost thirty years ago. However, this study had so many valid points that I felt it maintained its credibility and validity. In this study, Dr. Stein interviews and observes several first year college students in their English Literature courses as they interact with and engage in their literature. She describes the study in more detail by stating, "On such tasks, students are reading in order to create a text of their own, trying to integrate information from sources with ideas of their own, and attempting to do so under the guidance of a purpose they must themselves create. Because these reading-to-write tasks ask students to integrate reading, writing, and rhetorical purpose, they open a door to critical literacy" (Stein 1).

In this study, Stein explores the issues students have with being able to read a text, comprehend it enough to draw their own conclusions, and have strong enough writing skills to translate their conclusions into a type of literary or rhetorical analysis. Dr. Stein evaluated students as they interacted with “four categories of cognitive processing that supported both reading and writing behavior: Monitoring, Elaborating, Structuring, and Planning” (Stein 7). Professors then looked at how students applied these processes in the following areas: “moving from the source text to a new text, applying prior knowledge, using practiced strategies, balancing creativity with contextual constraints” (Stein 11). It was at this point that I realized that this was not a contradiction to my previous source, at all. In fact, this study furthered my understanding in the sheer amount of ways that strong reading and writing skills really do connect. I had to admit that I felt a little foolish at this moment. Prior to engaging in this research, I was spending so much of my time focusing on the different ways I could present outlines with quote integration, sentences starters, etc., to help my students improve their writing skills in isolation. I didn't consider looking at this problem from a more structured reading standpoint rather than as a writing skill itself. It is now clear that what I need to be focused on is not solely writing skill based; perhaps I need be to focusing on providing my students with different strategies for reading comprehension and analysis. Maybe if I provide more ways for students to actively read a text, their comprehension skills will improve and their ability to effectively write about that text, and thus, incorporate context in their evidence, will follow.

After I realized that my research had taken a new turn, I started to focus on finding resources for strategies to teach students how to read to write; I now wanted to know what experts identified how to best teach reading skills that provide students with the tools to successfully write a literary analysis, and as a result, be better able to incorporate context when

integrating evidence in their essays. Again, after some guidance for where to search next, I came across Kelly Gallagher, teacher and author of the book *In the Best Interest of Students*. On Dr. Gallagher's website, he posts several classroom resources, one of which in particular caught my eye. "Tracking Your Thinking" is one of the many sources that Dr. Gallagher has posted for improving reading skills. This is an amazing resource that I am definitely going to use in my classroom in some capacity. The best way to describe it is as a combination of an annotation guide, a KWL chart, and collection of exit slip sentence starters. This resource integrates all elements of the reading process for students and allows them to respond, analyze, and comprehend each part of it. This source from Dr. Gallagher is so versatile and can be used in so many different capacities, that even though I knew my search for best practices was certainly not over, I now feel that I have enough new resources to pull from and use in my classroom next year. I will really be able to see if these resources, when put into action, will work to improve my students' reading skills and thus, help to enhance their abilities to thoroughly incorporate context from a text in their own writing.

After completing my research, I realized that I had been led down a path I wasn't expecting at all; I started my search by looking for sources that would help me to find ways to teach my students to better integrate context in their quoted evidence. Because of this, I expected to find sources that were academic writing support based. What I ended up finding were a variety of both writing and reading strategies that are engaging for students and seemingly easy to implement. I am hoping that with the incorporation of these strategies into my curriculum as early as this coming school year, I will see that my students are not only less intimidated by integrating context when writing a formal essay, but they will be able to complete this skill effectively and show major improvement.

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ENG 5585: Writing Project for Teachers

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### Project Based Learning: Promoting Participation and Encouraging Excellence

With educational buzzwords rapidly emerging and becoming more critical every day, there is a push now more than ever for students to engage in authentic real-life practices.

Teachers are feeling the push to ensure that their pupils are career and college ready, while also guaranteeing that they will meet or exceed standards on a slew of tests. As educators across the country focus on crossing off these requirements while they structure their units and daily

lessons, it is incredibly easy to overlook the need for creativity, the yearning for real-life opportunities, and the option to collaborate with others. Project Based Learning (PBL) may be the answer to several educational prayers. PBL is an “authentic instructional model” where students are encouraged to “plan, implement, and evaluate” a self-driven project that holds weight beyond the four walls of a classroom (Railsback). During a PBL unit, students work over several self-governed periods to create a project or presentation that is “realistic” (Thomas).

Research has proven that PBL “builds content understanding, raises academic achievement, engages students, and promotes motivation to learn” (“What is Project-Based Learning?”). While PBL may be a “buzzy” word, it also may help teachers meet the rigorous requirements while also tapping in to student creativity. This new method of structuring units will promote motivation for both pupils and educators alike by encouraging student participation as well as teacher assessment and revision.

My search for information related to PBL was centered around one question: Are the benefits worth the hype? I have seen many PBL units, have explored many lessons, but I had yet to see any research elaborating upon the benefits of the strategy. I needed to know if students and teachers would benefit from the use of PBL units. Thus, I began reading several scholarly articles, creating discussion with other teachers, and ordered Trevor Muir's *The Epic Classroom*, which is centered around PBL ideas. I organized my research into several categories: the intended goals of PBL, how PBL helps students solve real-world problems, how PBL increases struggling students' participation and motivation, and what the teacher's role should look like in a PBL unit. Through this research, I was able to assess the value of PBL and its future role in my classroom.

Teachers are constantly being pushed to communicate learning goals to their students, and PBL units go a step further as they allow the students and teachers to create these goals together. Teachers and students together can "develop an outline that explains the project's essential elements and expectations" (Railsback). Presenting a central question to students at the beginning of a PBL unit is critical. Students need to understand the connection between the central question, the daily lessons, and the projects in order to comprehend the significance of the unit (Barron). By allowing students to recognize what they are being asked to learn through the central question, they are then able to direct their own learning through the unit (Barron). Through this newfound direction, students have an "increased ability" to ask organic questions; thus, students are moving towards the process of learning from each other, rather than learning from the teacher alone (Barron). These learning goals generally meet the "requirement" of including a real-life application, and therefore increase the project's overall effectiveness (Thomas). The real-life learning goals implemented in PBL units encourage students to

continually make connections from their own experiences to their education. Through the goals set within these units, teachers extend students' learning beyond the classroom.

The push for students to connect their learning to their communities is constantly increasing today. When students make connections to other learning communities, they are making their work meaningful and also create several new opportunities for learning (Barron). With the push for PBL also comes the push for student-centered presentations. Presenting projects to an outside audience and enforcing deadlines which originate from this audience is comparable to real-life situations (Barron). The incorporation of these "real-life challenges" moves the focus on "authentic problems or questions" where the solutions suggested by the students could possibly be implemented (Thomas). This facet of PBL also encourages students to effectively convey a message and also allows them to receive and analyze feedback from their audiences (Barron). In doing so, these PBL units are experienced as "real" to the students ("A Framework"). According to research on PBL units, "learning is maximized" when the unit "resembles the real-life context in which the to-be-learned material will be used" (Thomas). Therefore, a high quality PBL unit "reflects what happens in the world outside of school" ("A Framework"). Now more than ever, students are in crucial need of preparation for the world that awaits them. Embracing PBL units may be the answer to adequately prepare them. In doing so, students are using the same "tools, techniques, and technology" that are utilized in the workforce ("A Framework"). PBL units make the push for students to think about their communities. Through these projects, students "make an impact on other people and communities," and they are able to make their voices heard ("A Framework"). In order to make these projects a reality for teachers and students alike, scaffolding is required to ensure success.

In order for students to understand the goals of the PBL units, scaffolding is necessary. Effective “communication, coaching, and articulation” are keys to successful scaffolding (Barron). By introducing daily lessons that are focused around problem-based learning, the PBL unit will be more effective and produce student results of a higher quality. Daily problem-based learning forces the students to understand why the activities are relevant to the goals of the project (Barron). This form of scaffolding allows the students to see and comprehend the big picture in day-to-day instruction. In an effective PBL unit, the scaffolding which takes place through daily lessons “combines problem statements, databases, and a tutorial process to help students hone in” their critical thinking skills before the final culminating assessment takes place (Thomas). These daily lessons offer a challenge at the end of a lesson rather than a conclusion. All information to complete this challenge should be offered throughout the lesson (Barron). Beginning a PBL unit with these “simulated problems” allows students to foster a “level of shared knowledge and skill,” which then leads them to the culminating project (Barron). Scaffolding the learning in such a way creates the opportunity for students to “develop a more flexible level of skills and understanding,” which are later implemented in the formative assessment (Barron). This incorporation of daily exposure to problem-based learning generally results in students who are more motivated to learn. They tend to perceive the problem-based learning lessons as preparation for the final assessment (Barron). With the scaffolding of lessons, students are encouraged and are more willing to participate throughout the PBL unit.

It has been proven that PBL units promote student participation gratefully. Several facets contribute to this increase of participation. “Small group settings, opportunities to offer input and peer-to-peer reviews” all encourage students to cooperate and engage with one another, as well as the teacher (Barron). Small groups are the simplest and most common way to encourage

students to work together. These groupings are especially effective if students develop “norms of individual accountability” (Barron). This is when students must understand that they are to reach a “level of achievement,” which is communicated through the group, before progressing to the next step (Barron). Through small group interaction, students will begin to feel empowered by using these effective work habits. As they strengthen their critical thinking skills, students are increasing their productivity (Thomas). Due to this increase in participation and productivity, “8Barron% of low motivated students” showed growth in motivation (Thomas). Thus, it is safe to assume that PBL increases student self-esteem. Students are proven to take pride as they complete their projects, especially if these projects have “value outside the classroom” (Railsback). Through this increase of motivation, students are also more apt to obtain literacy skills, such as “using multiple texts, revisiting texts, and evaluating information” in the English Language Arts classroom (Thomas). Teachers also have reported that when their classroom is engaging in a PBL unit, students answer more questions, take part in more reflective writing, go through a more in-depth comprehension of topics, and participate in critical thinking student-led discussions (Thomas). However, the most crucial skill that students learn through PBL units which is carried over for real-life application is the power of collaboration. “When students collaborate, they are contributing individual voices, talents, and skills to a shared piece of work,” while also adapting, listening, and respecting the contributions of others (“A Framework”). These real-world lessons are most effectively taught when the teacher serves as a facilitator.

By assuming the role of a coach, facilitator, or a Socratic questioner during a PBL unit, student success increases. By doing so, students are “led to construct a diagnosis by generating hypotheses, collecting information relevant to their ideas, and evaluating their hypotheses” (Thomas). This student improvement is contributed to student-centered units. The lack of a

typical lecture format increases student engagement on a day-to-day basis. Thus, teachers should “provide a method of coaching” that encourages exploration, but also allows students to “retain control” over their projects (Thomas). The teachers should facilitate “decision making, thinking, and problem solving skills” in order to act effectively as a PBL unit coach (Railsback). By serving as a facilitator rather than an instructor, students “become proficient at preparing beliefs and making presentations,” which is comparable to a relationship that students will experience in the workforce (Thomas). This method of teaching has been used in “businesses, architecture, law,” and “combines problem statements, databases, and a tutorial process (Thomas). The teacher and the student can reach “mutual insights” by discussing the “implications ... and making additional suggestions” (Thomas). As a coach, students are also more apt to participate in frequent self-monitored reflection.

PBL units have the unique opportunity to allow students and teachers to create assessments and reflections together. The achievement of PBL units are focused on “outcomes of student learning to monitor progress” as well as identifying “strength and weaknesses to help students grow” (Railsback). In PBL, these assessments can be done through self-reflection. By putting weight on self-assessment, PBL “helps students develop the ability to monitor their own understanding” of a topic (Barron). Additionally, frequent self-assessment allows students opportunities to “revise their learning processes as necessary” (Barron). Because PBL units are heavily student-centered and student-driven, it is only logical that the assessment follows the same pattern. Throughout the unit, students are encouraged to keep journals or logs to “continually assess their progress” (Railsback). These journals should be shared with their teacher to ensure that achievement is indeed occurring. Constant student reflection can help students and teachers to “understand thinking processes, reasoning behind decisions, ability to

arrive at conclusions and communicate what they have learned” (Railsback). After reflecting on their accomplishments, “students retain project content and skills longer, develop a greater sense of control over their own education, and build confidence in themselves” (“A Framework”).

While student self-assessment is a clear benefit of PBL units, teachers can also gain from their own reflections.

Self-reflection is arguably the most important aspect of education. Teachers should constantly be searching for ways to better improve their delivery, assessments, and daily tasks. Through PBL, teachers are able to reflect on their lessons and also are encouraged to attempt changes “through enactment linked with collaboration and feedback” (Thomas). PBL offers a unique assessment tool that no other formative assessment truly allows. By adapting units to PBL units, teachers are able to select specific assessment tasks to evaluate for specific students (Railsback). In PBL, teacher can ensure that assessment is ongoing, and thus enables teachers to monitor that students are meeting expectations and keeping “on track with timelines and goals” (Railsback). This is otherwise impossible by simply assigning worksheets and multiple choice tests. The formative assessment and self-reflection aspects of PBL truly allow and encourage both students and teachers to “improve the quality of their work” (“A Framework”). By continually self-assessing, teachers are able to raise academic achievement, mastery, and problem-solving skills all through PBL.

The concepts of PBL will certainly find their new homes in room 225 in the fall. Instead of requiring students to complete a rigid and formulaic project as the final assessment for the unit, my units will be centered around PBL. In doing so, students, teachers, and parents will be able to see and understand the value of each lesson in the unit, as each lesson is working towards a final product. Through these units, students will learn the importance of time management,

critical thinking skills, and even writing practices. The research supports that using the PBL units in this way will lead my students to better comprehension, application of knowledge, and encourage risk-taking in their writing, which is ultimately my goal as their teacher.

With their newfound creative voices, my students will be encouraged to take more risks and apply their creativity to their critical thinking. Prompts and projects in my classroom will be changed to increase student engagement with a text, and positive reinforcement will be commonplace through analyzing these PBL units. Thus, this new strategy of reading and writing will foster better habits and hopefully encourage my students to take pride and enjoy their writing and learning, rather than merely completing an assignment to earn a grade. In turn, reading their work should be enjoyable and providing positive written feedback should be a skill that will come with ease. Cutting the chains of formulaic projects and prompts and embracing the freedom of possibilities that comes with PBLs may not be a simple transition, but it is a welcome one for all parties involved.

Over the next school year, my students will participate in a project for every unit we complete. One unit I specifically have in mind is a service project while my students are concurrently writing their World Changers essays. Students will be placed in small groups, and they will decide on a service project to complete. The students will then do all necessary planning in order to complete the service project. They will contact any groups or schools that they will be working with, which will teach them communication skills. They will learn time management by working on these assignments outside of school hours. Students will be asked to use their critical thinking and writing skills and develop a proposal that will be need to be presented in order to be approved by the school board. While this activity seems to check all the boxes for a PBL unit, I am concerned about several things. Will my students stay involved for

the whole project? Am I able to meet all the necessary curriculum while including these projects? How will the grading process affect my own time management in the classroom? While these questions are overwhelming and make PBL seem risky, the benefits heavily outweigh the rewards.

Students and teachers alike will undoubtedly benefit from the increased participation, collaboration, and revision that comes hand-in-hand with PBL units. Thus, PBL will find a frequent spot in my classroom. Motivating students to learn is one of the biggest struggles of 21st Century teaching. However, with PBL units, students are able to see real-world connections, embrace their creativity, and enhance skills that will carry over into the workforce. Although I may be concerned with keeping my students on task, meeting all of the required curriculum, and making time to grade these projects, I am looking forward to changing the learning dynamic of my classroom. While buzzwords fly around the academic scene, the positive facets of PBL make it one that teachers, including myself, will want to catch and harness.

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English 5585

Classroom-based I-Search Paper

July 7, 2019

## Building Reading Choice Through Independent Reading

### **Introduction: My background in reading instruction**

In my English classes, I always try to do a reading survey with students at the beginning of the year so I know what their experiences with reading have been and what their strengths and deficits are. I recently reviewed a past survey with my juniors, and I noticed that *every single* student reported that they thought knowing how to reading well was either “important” or “very important.” If I had stopped right there, I would be thinking that this year was going to be a breeze. I have a class of budding literary minds in my midst! They love reading and know its inherent value! Yet, more than half of students (about 60 percent) reported that reading a book is something they like to do “not very often” or “never.” These results were typical for my other classes that year and in previous years. Like most people with healthy eating and regular exercise, these teenagers know that reading is something that is good for them, but they do not enjoy it or dedicate time to reading. What accounts for the discrepancy? While students value reading and its importance as a life skill, they do not like to read.

As a teacher, I want to bridge that gap. I already have a buy-in, for the most part: we can all agree that reading is important. Now I want students to actually like to read so that they can acquire the reading skills they already deem important. This is a tall order for a high school teacher,

especially a teacher of upperclassmen: some have had years of negative experiences with reading, forming their opinions on themselves as readers and staunchly holding to those views.

To build reading choice in my classes, I integrate independent reading in order to give students more autonomy over what they read. I have yet to find the balance, though, between holding students accountable and being overly lax. I would definitely not say I am successful with my independent reading units. I want to find solutions for how to give choice but also have students take it seriously and really get immersed in a book.

In addition to addressing reading in the English classroom, I am a reading specialist and will be teaching a section of a reading intervention class to freshmen who are reading below grade level. I especially would like to use the research that I have found with these students in this class. Even though I have been a reading specialist since 2012, this is the first time I have explicitly used this degree in a setting that is specifically established for reading intervention.

### **Description of the search**

I want to focus on building student choice in reading. In my research process, I found many sources, and I needed to narrow it down. So, I searched *reading choice*. And then within the results I searched *high school*. I was getting some good resources, but I was noticing that I was also getting articles about school choice, which is not my topic. Therefore, I went back and made sure to put quotation marks: "reading choice" and "high school." Again, some good resources, but many of them were fairly old, and I am most interested in more current research. I then went back into the search and added the date parameters 2000-2019.

In addition to using the Advanced Search feature on JSTOR and EBSCO, I went back to good resources I found and read through the footnotes. Through that process, I found another great resource: "Farewell to 'A Farewell to Arms.'" I typed the title into JSTOR: there were no

results, just a lot of texts analyzing Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms." Then I went to EBSCO and did the same thing, and immediately found it right at the top. I used this process with other sources, and while some were dead-ends, most were easily located in these EIU Booth Library databases.

### **What I learned from my research**

I found an article "Trapped in a Cycle of Low Expectations: An Exploration of High School Seniors' Perspectives About Academic Reading." While the entire article isn't related to reading choice, there was relevant research to use as a basis for why choice should be incorporated: "Eighty-five percent of participants reported in the survey that they wanted choice in their reading over a single classroom textbook. However, graduating seniors in this investigation still reported their content teachers relied on one class text to teach their courses" (Hooley, et al. 328). I find this fascinating. Now I am wondering WHY we don't use choice more. I'm sure most of us KNOW students prefer it. Donalyn Miller, in another source I found, agrees with the importance of choice, writing that "no single practice inspires my students to read as much as the opportunity to choose their own books does" ("Creating a Classroom Where Readers Flourish" 90). So, what is getting in our way of giving students choice and how can we get rid of those obstacles? This is an interesting direction for my research.

I have no problem giving students choice with their independent reading, but what I struggle with is how to organize the structure. Luckily, I found a source in *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* where the authors focused on a teacher's successful implementation of a Reading Workshop model with mini-lessons, journals, and conferencing. "Following each minilesson, students read and Chris conferred with students. Chris worked to make connections between the minilesson content and his students' personal books (Morgan & Wagner 662). This is a model that

can be adapted easily in a high school classroom. I like that the mini-lessons give the independent reading a touchstone or anchor, so students aren't just aimlessly reading (or zoning out) on their own.

I also found the article "Using Digital Tools to Facilitate Reader's Workshop." I like the direction it took me. It discusses how to integrate some digital tools in reader's workshop models. Ginocchio shared how she uses GoogleApps to facilitate reader's workshops, which give students choice in reading and allow teachers to monitor and assess students as they do so. A common struggle is to be able to give feedback and constantly know what students are doing since they're reading various texts. This article gave good, practical ideas for how to manage that and make student choice a reality in the classroom.

However, Ginocchio ran into the same problems that I do. She had students reading very quickly and other students reading at a "snail's pace," "journaling about the same book for months at a time" (28). She does not give a penalty "for students who did not read as long as they wrote a passable journal entry" (28). I have a similar process, and these issues are what spurred me to do this paper; I had hoped to find solutions to this problem.

For some solutions, I turned to a great resource I found from searching the footnotes of other sources was "Farewell to 'A Farewell to Arms.'" This resource was all about the classroom novel, why it is not the best model, and what other ideas are out there. Instead of the whole-class novel, the authors gave five guidelines for teachers to use in their classrooms. The first was to guide instruction by theme, not book. "Themes we select should allow students to engage with contemporary issues — issues that they and we are struggling with — while reading both current and classic works" (Fisher, Ivey 496). Teachers could group students who have similar themes in their books, creating natural book clubs or literary circles. It brings a common thread to a class of independent readers. Second, teachers should pick texts that are a range of levels. This is

important for differentiation. Teachers must ensure they are reaching each student at the appropriate level. The third is that teachers should pick texts that are contemporary and match students' interests.

The most enlightening advice was in the fourth tenet: teachers should "[o]rchestrate instruction that builds students' competence" (Fisher, Ivey 496). I love this advice. Teachers guide students; they are not the source of all information. The teacher begins with a whole-group read aloud or minilesson. "Then students move into groups — some are reading, others are discussing books, others are writing or getting peer feedback on their writing — while the teacher meets with specific students to provide guided instruction" (Fisher, Ivey 496). This makes me think of Kelsey's lesson using stations. I would like to incorporate this in my independent reading unit. Last, teachers should instruct strategies with texts that are "readable and meaningful" (Fisher, Ivey 497). This makes me think of all the ways I can apply *Notice and Note* strategies.

### **Conclusion: Where to go from here**

I would like to adapt these ideas to my independent reading units. I would like to incorporate a Reading Workshop model, but being in high school, this cannot be what we do every day, all day. However, this could be what we do each Friday. I would like to do a minilesson, followed by reading time and a journal. I would like to conference with students about their reading and writing, and I need to be organized and intentional. Too often the conferences run long or I cut them because I anticipated something else wouldn't take as long as it did.

In addition to minilessons and journals, a key point that Miller made was that students should share what they read with each other. I would like to incorporate this more, and she had

some good teaching ideas. One was a graffiti wall, in which the teacher has a large sheet of butcher paper (I can easily see this on a bulletin board I have in my room), and students “write the title of a book and a memorable quote from it . . . Every line serves as a book endorsement” (“Cultivating Wild Readers” 37). This could easily be adapted into a station, which Fisher and Ivey mentioned in their article. Another point Miller made was to seat “students with common reading interests at the same table. They can suggest titles to one another for additional reading and participate in book discussions (“Cultivating Wild Readers” 37). Again, this ties in with Fisher and Ivey, who suggest grouping reading around a theme, not a book. The groups could be loosely based on a common theme. I could see doing this once a week in our reading groups and having them facilitate discussions. This could serve as my assessment of them as they discuss and write about what they are reading.

As far as assessment goes, Miller’s articles gave me the idea to have students do book reviews that they share with each other. My 5011 class had suggested having a class magazine, and this could be applied to these book reviews: we could make a classroom magazine of book reviews. I could also make this digital: Ginocchio gave good ideas for using GoogleApps, and I could easily make a class folder for students to submit their book reviews. Then this is a resource for other students. Plus, it gives students real-life audience of their peers.

Overall, through this search process, I have found a plethora of ideas for independent reading, which builds student choice and investment in the learning process. On Thursday, July 18, I have a workshop about independent reading with other teachers in my district. I plan on coming with these resources to share as we discuss best practices for building reading choice in our curriculum. I still want to find out other best practices and assessment ideas for independent reading. I am curious to see what other organizational structures teachers put in place to foster both

student choice and accountability. It is a tough balance, but I am hoping to be able to figure it out eventually.

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## Teaching Poetry in the Classroom: How important is it?

### **Introduction:**

I do not like poetry. There. I said it. I am the worst English teacher because I do not like to read, teach, or write poetry. When I was presented with this opportunity to explore something in the writing field, I wanted to be in something that I did not know a lot about. So, I turned to the subject that makes me cringe and moan; A subject that makes me nervous to teach because I am not exactly confident about it. Poetry. Over the last three weeks, I have looked extensively at the reading, writing, teaching, and performing of poetry in order to better my teaching and knowledge on the subject.

### **The Search:**

Thinking about how I wanted to gather my information, I first went to the internet. I looked up some unhelpful pages about teaching and reading poetry. I decided that I wanted to do some non-traditional research instead. So I looked up when a poetry slam would be held at our local coffee shop, and, to my surprise, there is one in the near future (July 1st to be exact). I signed up to attend that--but not to perform. Then I wanted to go to one of the best teachers I know, and that person is my associate principal of curriculum and instruction, Kate Morris. I interviewed her, and received great feedback. Next up, I started to complete my creative blogs in poetry to start getting into the mindset of a poet. Finally, I went back to the internet to find some research about the teaching of poetry.

## **Why We Should Teach Poetry**

Throughout my research, I kept finding a similar conclusion: we should teach poetry because it allows students to develop skills that will help them read and analyze other literature. In an article titled “Poetry: What’s the Sense in Teaching it?” the overall conclusion of their study leads them to believe that “Poetry provides teachers with an authentic text to teach different literacy skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. Poetry is fun. Both students and teachers really do enjoy it” (Stickling, et. al. 38). All of these skills can be developed by the use of poetry in the classroom. And poetry can be really fun for students--and in that same article, it discussed the positive and negative associations with poetry, and how if a teacher is not a poetry lover, then it will be clear to students, who will then dislike it as well (Stickling, et. al. 34). In my interview with Kate Morris, Principal of Curriculum and Instruction at Plainfield East High School, I asked her how important she thinks it is to have poetry taught in high school. She said “Really important. It allows students to really study the impact of diction and syntax. The skills they gain from analyzing poetry translate directly to fiction.” I found this interesting because it really aligns with what the article says. Both agree that the skills learned when teaching poetry will help students once they start reading the literary fiction. In my experience, most curriculums I have taught each poetry first to introduce literary devices, and then we move into the fiction for the unit. Clearly, poetry can be the foundation that sets the student up for success.

## **Methods for Teaching Poetry**

Through the course of my research I found many different approaches to the teaching of poetry. I first wanted to understand how poetry is approached within my own school, so I asked

Kate Morris what advice she has for teaching poetry: “Line by line. Word by word. Poetry is not always interpretive; this is my pet peeve! Often times, students think they can decide what a poem is about because poetry can be whatever they want it to be – WRONG! The author has an intended meaning. Prior to teaching, students need to learn symbolism on a universal scale, as well as theme.” Kate’s MA is in creative writing, so her expertise is valued at our school. Slowly developing the idea, theme, and symbolism works well for a lot of students. Often times, students will become frustrated by the re-reading of a poem because they think they understand it right away. Teaching the importance of hearing, reading, and understanding a poem goes beyond reading it once.

In an article titled “Poetry is Dying,” the author explains that there is a process to reading and teaching a poem in class. He discusses the four step process to engaging a student in a poem:

The first principle for effective poetry teaching is *modelling*, which points to the teacher’s active exhibiting of engagement with and writing of poetry. The second is *integrating* poetry into diverse learning contexts and meaning spaces, mediated with technologies.

Thirdly, *re-centering* poetry away from but still connected to classrooms, in third spaces that are meaningful for students. Finally, *challenging* the rigidities and obstacles that often distance poetry from experience. (Creely 122).

This seems like a really intense and elaborate process, but, implemented correctly, could be very beneficial to students. Each step is developed to guide students down the path to understanding a poem. The modelling is the most important because that is probably the biggest challenge to teachers. Engaging in the reading, writing, and analyzing of poetry can be a daunting task to many. But, teachers read the novels they teach, so shouldn’t we also do the same for the poetry? It’s shorter, but it’s just as important.

In the same article, Creely explains that there is a process to reading and teaching a poem in class. He mentions how the first step to understanding a poem is to make a connection with it: “as a reader encounters an image in a poem, it reignites and brings into consciousness what is laid down in memory from previous similar experiences. Associated memories are (re)experienced in the encounter with the image, though this new experiencing is certainly not the same as its first experiencing” (Creely 119). This is a really interesting concept because it begs the question *what if a student does not have a connection to the poem?* There is some validity in this because this is how we reach a lot of struggling students. We find something that interests them. When I asked Kate about struggling students she said “Go slow. Use music to help them – often students love music but think they hate poetry – they don’t realize the connection.” Using music as a hook to students can be very helpful especially for those reluctant poets. A lot of the times, students will be willing to look through song lyrics for devices, but, when it comes to a poem, they refuse because it is too “hard.”

### **Poetry in the Real World**

This part of the research was the most fun because I got to read and listen to poetry. Music is probably the biggest relation from poetry to real life. In March I made an effort to incorporate more poetry in the classroom, so I did “Poetry Madness” where we picked poems and voted on them in a bracket. It was so fun! A lot of students gave me lyrics for us to analyze and understand. My two most common poets were Rupi Kaur and Tupac Skaur, who battled for the title. Our winning poem was Tupac Shakur’s “When Ure Hero Falls.” I went back and read these two poems when creating this project, and I found the following lines to be fascinating: “when ure hero falls so do the stars / and so does the perception of tomorrow / without my/ hero there is only / me alone 2 deal with my sorrow.” Students commented on this particular part

because they said it evoked so much emotion from the reader. After reading it again, and applying the research I found, I realized that this poem (song) has so much behind it that students can very much relate to--especially if they have lost someone close to them.

When I asked Kate why students should read poetry in high school, she said “Studying rhetoric and meaning teach students how to argue a point – this is a real-life skill.” Argument is usually a unit in most high school classrooms because of its importance in the real world. The ability to make a claim and defend that claim is a skill that can be used in virtually any setting. Creely’s article also makes a connection to the students’ understanding of their surroundings. He says reading and teaching poetry can “lead to new meanings and understandings of the world, and of the self within the social realm” (120). In regards to “the real world,” there is the world and then there is the self. Creely makes the argument that there is more to the real world than everyone else. There is also the self within the social spectrum as well. And that is just as important for students to understand, as it is for them to know real life skills.

On Monday, July 1st, I attended a poetry slam inside our local library. I really enjoyed going to this! I wanted to see how people present the poetry that they have written. I wanted to learn from people who are passionate about their writing. The slam was held in our coffee shop within the library, and there were only eight of us. I was a chicken and didn’t share any of my writing, but I did listen to some really powerful poems from others. Our school does a monthly poetry slam, and I think I will attend those now! I would love to hear my students recite their poetry. I learned from the slam that there does not need to be a deep meaning to every poem or creative piece that we write. One girl recited a poem about breakfast--it was very good and made me hungry! Another girl recited a poem about her father who died, and another girl recited a

poem about summer. All of them had the same impact on me regardless of the content: I loved to hear their powerful words.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the research I found about the teaching of poetry will be so helpful to my classroom. The step process that Creely lays out is fantastic, and the advice I received from my administrator is helpful to the development of my curriculum for the upcoming year. This process has also given me a new perspective on people who write and perform poetry. I am starting to think I was just never given a poem that I could really relate to, or maybe I was never taught how to read a poem correctly. Or maybe I was scared of poems. Or maybe I was scared of what a poem would evoke from me. At the end of the day, I think I can safely say that I am eager and excited for the upcoming poetry unit, and I am happy to say that I am not longer a hater of poetry.

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### Finding Shakespeare through Writing

As I began the isearch journey I wanted to discover how best to motivate my high school students to really want to write. That desire to write needs to be built upon the help of enthusiastic teachers, great literature, and creative lesson plans that inspire students to bring pen to paper. So what was I missing in my classroom? Why do I feel that when it is time to write, students do so reluctantly? I love my content area of English language arts and am genuinely enthusiastic about the literature I teach. Though they are mostly classics, students understand and enjoy *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *Anthem* by Ayn Rand, *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare and the handful of classic short stories we read each year, as well as many other units and assignments. The most obvious answer to me was that it was time to reevaluate my lesson plans, activities, and strategies that I have clung to for over a decade. I do not need to reinvent myself, but instead reconsider how I have students approach literature through the writing I assign and make writing a more central part of a literary unit.

This coming school year I will be teaching a new grade level and with it new curriculum. The material will be similar to the content I have taught before. For example, William Shakepeare's *Macbeth* will be a staple for next year's seniors. I have taught Macbeth in the past, so I am very comfortable with the play, but the content is not the issue. As I started to think about my approaches to Shakespeare and the amount and type of writing students do, it seems inadequate. I love to have students read Shakespeare out loud, rehearse, act, and record their

performances., but the only writing I do is translation, summary, and analysis. The types of writing I assign are boring in comparison to many of the fun oral and performance-based activities we were doing. Did I need to throw out those performance-based activities to make room for more writing? I found the answer to that question in how most teachers are effectively teaching William Shakespeare in their own classrooms.

In her article from the *Shakespeare Quarterly* titled “And Gladly Teach”, Peggy O’Brien raises the question many teachers have on their minds, “How best to teach Shakespeare?”. She synthesizes pages of bibliography to answer this question, and begins with an interesting thought. O’Brien notices that since most everyone encounters Shakespeare for the very first time in school, teachers are in a unique position to make students love or hate the works of the Bard, possibly for their entire lives. That is a lot of pressure on high school educators. Most of the research and scholarly advice O’Brien cites comes from teachers and instructors of the last half century in secondary and college-level classrooms. Her results show that the best strategies to make Shakespeare fun and engaging focus on a student-centered classroom and performance-based activities, mostly the reading out loud of the script by students and actual performance of the play. The advice for students to take ownership of the play is repeated throughout O’Brien’s article. The dangers of presenting Shakespeare exist when students have no to little control over not only the interpretation of the play, but the types of activities they do. “By offering a solely literary and analytical way into Shakespeare, teachers may be unwittingly teaching students a detrimental detachment from literature” (166). Teachers need to present Shakespeare, not as facts, symbols, and line-by-line interpretation but instead allow students to find their own meaning within characters and the text.

Since the most effective ways of teaching Shakespeare include the spoken word and performance-based activities, how can I best keep these tasks and incorporate them into student writing? One activity from *Reading Nonfiction* by Beers and Probst is the genre reformulation strategy (230). Having students write a scene in a different genre or pattern would place them center stage, give them control over the language and story, and hopefully inspire them to see Shakespeare (and maybe themselves) as great writers. From the examples I have seen, students maintain the structure of iambic pentameter in most genre rewrites, while rhyme may or may not be included as an extra challenge in this process. Students could read short scripts out loud, guess the genre or pattern, and vote on the most creative genre reformulation. Betsy Potash's newest takeoff or genre switch is similar to this method, but differs in name. Potash also has eight other engaging writing activities similar to this model in her

As I searched for more quick write activities for students Betsy Potash's website Spark Creativity impressed me. I was looking for quick, engaging prompts or activities that would work well for characters and themes, activities that might lead students to creative and inspiring ideas they would want to write more deeply about in an analysis or expository paper. Before they can write about such difficult topics, students need to make a strong connection to the characters and their experiences. Betsy Potash delivers nine unique writing activities that can do just that in her article "Nine Writing Activities for any Shakespeare Play". I think it would be less overwhelming if I chose only two or three of these activities for one round of writing, and spreading them out over the course of the play. Her nine suggestions include adding a new character, the newest takeoff (which is very similar to the genre switch), an email exchange, a lightning thesis round, interior monologues, mash-ups, texting in pockets, and motivational

statements. I like the idea of combining the lightning thesis round and motivational statements to share with the class to generate ideas and support for any longer writing assignment.

Yet another great writing strategy from Betsy Potash is the one pager. The one pager is exactly what it sounds like, a one page response to a work of literature. What makes this assignment unique is the creative capabilities students have toward completing it. Teachers can set their own standards, guidelines and questions to guide the assignment, but students will choose their own quotes, images, and one-line personal statements or impressions about the work. The idea is to analyze deeply, make the page full of color, use significant quotes, and express yourself through personal connections. This could be done for each act of the play, the entire play, or any piece of literature.

WGOITP? What an unusual looking acronym. When I navigated through *The New York Times* website a couple of years ago, I came across "What's Going On in This Picture?" and immediately thought it was a brilliant writing activity. However, I failed to ever use it. As I searched for writing strategies for Shakespeare, it appeared again. I love this idea of using WGOITP? to teach critical thinking skills, inference skills, and analytic writing through the use of photojournalism, and then applying that knowledge to the plays of Shakespeare, or any complicated piece of literature. The article "Reader Idea/Before Tackling Shakespeare, Students Analyze Puzzling Photos" by Christa Forster and The Learning Network shows us how one New York teacher uses these interesting visuals every Monday to prompt writing and thinking in her classroom.

The odd and intriguing photos are displayed once a week on Monday morning. Students are asked to answer the three visual thinking strategy questions: "What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? and What more can you find?" in 10-15 minutes.

These pictures challenge students in a stress-free way to think critically and take chances with what they are thinking. At the same time, the teacher is reinforcing the analytic format of a paragraph. The student must construct a thesis or topic sentence, provide evidence, analyze what they see, and write a reflection statement. The remainder of the period, and the rest of the week students are reading and writing about Shakespeare, using the same skills and approaches to write about the characters or scenes from Shakespeare. This approach makes Shakespeare, or any difficult text, more approachable for students by building their confidence and skills in one fun activity.

To conclude, after four hundred years William Shakespeare has stood the test of time. He remains timeless and universal for all ages, but if the writing strategies teachers employ fail to make a personal connection between student and material, meaning and enthusiasm may be lost. Continual search for self renewal as a teacher is a critical part of being a good teacher. The short, engaging writing activities I discovered through this process can create that connection and make Shakespeare's themes relevant. In addition, these short writing activities are the origin of deeper thought, stronger analysis, and more extensive writing assignments and performance-based activity for any literary text that challenges students, not only Shakespeare.

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### How to Open the Curtains on Grants

How I got interested in this topic

Dostoyevsky said in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "The world says: "You have needs -- satisfy them. You have as much right as the rich and the mighty. Don't hesitate to satisfy your needs; indeed, expand your needs and demand more." The central idea of the quote that when needs are not met, the people who identify them should seek to satisfying them relates well to the situations that schools are in all across the country. Inner city and rural schools in Illinois have struggled with funding for many years, and some programs are suffering more than others. This has led many educational institutions to search for alternate funding from grants. As a teacher, I saw it this year in the drama department the most in my school, and it has inspired me to search for a way to help our school.

Last year, the school in which I teach needed someone to direct the fall play. The spring musical director simply could not do it, and the fall play director from the year before had retired. After several students asked me if I would consider directing the play, I agreed because I felt like it would be unfair to the students to not have a director and cancel the play. On the first day of rehearsal, I walked into the auditorium at the high school and looked at the curtains on the stage. One thing I noticed right away was that the cyclorama, the curtain at the back of the stage, had large quantities of duct tape covering holes in it. I talked with the director of the theater department, and she said that the curtains that are on all parts of the stage are not flame retardant

which is completely against fire code. When I discussed why they have not been updated, she said that totally new curtains would cost \$30,000 or more to replace everything. Even though the theater program at Princeton High School is over 100 years old, it does not have much funding outside of the plays. The school needs full new curtain set for safety reasons, and I want to write a grant to try to get it.

This led me to several research questions. The first is, “Where are there grants to help theater programs in rural high schools?” I narrowed this search because many of the grants say that they are for inner city schools, and I am in a rural high school, so it disqualifies my school for many of these grants. My second research question is, “How do I write a successful grant for a school?” This is a question that I have struggled with for years. During my teaching career, I was the high school librarian at a very small rural high school in north central Illinois. As many of the rural schools do, it relied heavily on grants for technology and materials. One thing I had to do was write grants every year, and I did repeatedly. Every year I wrote at least three of them. It was an extremely frustrating thing for me because I consistently did not receive many of those grants that would do more than just maintain the library, but improve the programs. Once I was moved out of the library, the district librarian moved into the library where I had been previously. We talked often, and I found that she was successful in most of her grant writing, including funding an expanding nonfiction and reference section as well as the databases available to students. In our discussion, she said she thought it was just her creativity in the descriptions that made her successful, but I felt that there had to be more. Through my ISearch process, I found that there are many grants available for high schools, but few that will pay for accoutrements without matching funds, but also that in writing the grant, the writer needs to be specific and detailed as well as clear.

## The Search

I decided to look for information from various different places to address my quest for the new theatre curtains. My first research questions asks where to find grants for high school theater programs, and I turned to the internet for this. I started by searching for “grants for high schools.” This led me to a website called GetEdFunding.com, a site that has a large database of grants at state and national levels. It allows for the user to select the scope of the grant, whether state or national, the type of school that is eligible, the grade level for which it would be used, the focus, the content area, and the skills. Through this website, I decided that it would probably be a better option to look at the state level grants as, like college scholarships, national level grants are highly competitive and have low success rates. My school is a public high school, so I selected public 9-12. I did not see anything specifically under the focus that I thought would be useful for narrowing, so I moved to the content area of Arts and Reading/English/Language Arts. The skill that I felt would be most developed in this project was creativity, so that was the only skill I selected in my search. This narrowed my results down to about four. I saved the grants that seemed possible, and went to the web pages of the grants that seemed plausible. While I thought that I would have better results from searching within the confines of Illinois, I found that there were almost no grants that worked for my school. Most of them were limited to certain areas outside of North Central Illinois. I found some possibilities on the national level, but most of those, like the National Endowment for the Arts. The next step for me would be to determine how well this project would fit into the definitions of these grants, and for that I needed additional information about grant writing in general.

My new direction took me to my library, where I decided to explore for more sources that could help me find grants as well as write them, and as I expected, the library provided a

valuable resource to help me in my cause. I found the book *Grant Writing for Dummies, 5th edition* by Dr. Beverly A. Browning, professional grant writer for nonprofits and an instructor who teaches other people to write grants. I have found this book to be exceptionally helpful to address both research questions, but also it helped me to define and my terminology before I started limiting the grants themselves. For instance, I need to look for a grant that is either a capital support or program development. A capital support grant is a grant that can include equipment but that is also a major purchase (Browning 9). While I have not received a specific quote on the curtains, I received several estimates that they would range between \$30,000 and \$50,000 dollars, depending on quality and actual measurements of the stage. This is certainly a major project, though it would be bought in once purchase and have to be hung by a professional company. This project might also be considered a program development grant. Program development grants help to expand existing programs. Princeton High School has been a member of the International Thespian Society since 1951, and the school has consistently put on plays for over a hundred years. The stage and curtains are also used multiple times a year by local dance companies for dance recitals, the local play company for major theater productions, and all of the elementary schools for their music programs. By having two different options of grant types in which to search, I think that I have a better chance of finding something that will work for the project.

Browning's book suggests many different sources for scoping out grants. She suggests looking into more local level support, such as electric and gas companies, stores, and businesses (Browning 14). This reminded me of a grant that I had heard of many years ago from Ameren, the electric company. I pulled the website open for Ameren's grants, and it inspired me to also check Nicor and ComEd, as they also have a presence in our community. As each of these

companies have grants that might be a good match, I need to move into the actual skill of grant writing next, and I needed a new source.

Another source to help answer the question of how to write a grant that is likely to be accepted is my sister, Hazel, a technical writer who has experience in community grant writing. I decided to interview her on what it takes to write an appropriate grant. She gave me a list of different things, but the most important were:

1. Check the requirements of the grant. If it says matching, how much is required? If it says the grantee must be a school of a certain size or from a certain location and the school applying is not, then don't apply.
2. Be clear and concise in the writing. Many of the boards and panels that review the grants have hundreds of requests that they must sort through. They do not want to be confused. This includes using clear headings for each section, strong transitions within the storytelling to show why the grantee deserves the money and how that money will positively affect the beneficiaries.
3. Be creative. Find distinctive names and fully explain how the grant will help the broader community beyond the school if it is a community access grant.
4. Check all grammar carefully as they are normally highly competitive. This same idea was addressed in Browning's book. Some of the requirements can be as specific as spacing and font type and size on the applications (Browning 118).  
The readers of the grants may have hundreds of submissions. They want to choose projects where they know that the writer and/or administrator has put forth time and effort. They are giving money to the project, so they expect the grantees to show care.

5. Check deadlines carefully. There are different definitions for the grant deadlines. Some will have rolling deadlines, where it is open at essentially anytime. Some will have specific dates and deadlines as to when the application opens for submission as well as questions, and when all materials will need to be turned in. Incomplete grant submissions will disqualify the group requesting, and it may show a lack of follow through and organization, so it could affect the chances in later (Sims).

I found her suggestions to be helpful in sorting through the grants. I worry about the creative portion of the grant writing. Browning also discusses this idea of a creative name for the project. The project name “enhances the storytelling approach necessary in today’s highly competitive grants” (37). This storytelling element is key to the successful grant, as all grants require background information on the institution as well as the community the grant will serve. The demographics and descriptions of the population and a case scenario, where a story of a specific participant has overcome life obstacles so they can be served by the grant is often helpful. The information must be written in a way that is both concise and engaging (39), particularly in the statement of need portion, as well as the program design and plan of action. These portions must clearly state who will be in charge of the project, what the clear goals are for the monies, and how the monies will be spent and on what specifically. The statement of need should be truthful, but also slanted to show the extreme need, so Browning suggestions well developed “doom, gloom, drama, and trauma” (40). The granter needs to feel that the money is in fact needed. A well-developed story of the need for the curtains will get the project through the door, but a clear plan of action will be necessary consideration.

Upon suggestion from Dr. Murray, I investigated two more websites that teach how to write grants, particularly one from The Writing Center at The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. This website has many suggestions and tips for grant writing. While the suggested funding sources are irrelevant since they are limited to North Carolina and research for the university, the suggestions relate to voice and research knowledge are helpful. It suggests that the writer be mindful to appear to be creative, logical, analytical, and appear capable of executing the grant (The Writing Center). This creativity is key to the storytelling aspect of the grant writing. Browning also discusses this idea by reinforcing the need with “frantic language” (135). She states that this conveys the gaps and needs that the community has and encourages an emotionally compelling case for the grant.

After reviewing all of this information, I evaluated the grants that I thought would be possibilities to see if my project would match anything. Many of the major grants would have to be eliminated. The National Endowment for the Arts required 1:1 matching, something I know will not be provided without a great deal of additional fundraising. Many of the others that I marked had limits on the funding of \$5,000-\$10,000. These disqualified these grants as I do not think it would be very likely to score all of the money piecemeal.

Following these suggestions, I found that the Ameren grant may be the best option for this coming year. It is open to enriching the arts for non-profits in an area that serves Ameren. It does not require matching at any level, and it provides funds for more than \$5,000, which was a limit on several of the grants. It does require that there is a detailed budget list and a list of board members with titles and affiliations (Ameren). This is a grant that could work well for trying to fund the curtains, but would require additional support from the school and administration to be

sure that I have all of the correct information as well as approval by the school board in the endeavor.

### Conclusion

Having done this research, I have found that I am going to need to work with the school district closely to ensure that the project is a success. The deadline for Ameren is December 1, so I have time to discuss the grant with the Director of Drama and the administration. I already spoke with the Director of Drama, and she has the power to speak to the administration in August. Our plan at the moment is to get the green light from the administration and work on the writing this fall. With hard work and a bit of luck, I hope we can have new curtains for the auditorium by next spring.

I have learned a great deal about how to write grants from this process. I think I have a better understanding of how to locate funds for the school as well as how to write the grants in order to make my projects memorable and exciting. I also hope that it can provide the future generations of thespians and community members with a safer environment for their plays, recitals, and programs. I love the idea of lighting the fire of passion for art, but I certainly want to prevent burning the place down.

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