

“A Kaleidoscope of Change”

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“When what you know about ‘people who write’ becomes what you know ‘as a person who writes,’ what you know changes.” Katie Wood Ray

Introduction

Crimson red, sunshine yellow, pumpkin orange...the West Virginia Mountains bring forth colors symbolic of the changing season. Video playing, children sleeping, husband singing...I reflect upon the changes in family dynamics that death brings as we drive to Buffalo, N.Y. to attend my mother-in-law's funeral. I want my words to be as vivid and beautiful as the colors I am enjoying and the life we will soon honor and celebrate. One of the connections I had with my mother-in-law is that she too had a passion for teaching and she was very proud of my chosen profession.

Teaching has always been my life dream and I continually critique myself and find the area I most need to improve upon as an educator. Writing is my target for improvement and thus I am thrilled that CTI offered the invaluable opportunity for me to develop my skills and talents as a writer and as a writing teacher. Keri Russell states that, “Sometimes it's the smallest decisions that can change your life forever.” I'm finding that quote to come to fruition as I seek to understand the multi layers of writing.

As a student I don't remember receiving training on how to improve my writing skills. My father was the one person who would red line and critique every piece I wrote, never finding them “good enough” and forever encouraging me to revise my work. I am envious of the fact that my sister and husband are tremendously talented writers and thankful that our daughters are gifted with great “writing genes” as well. Lucy Calkins in her book *Launching the Writing Workshop* states that, “Our goal is to offer children the opportunity to bring their lives to school and put their lives on the page.” My desire as I have been absorbing the information in my seminar “Writing for Your Life” is to be able to motivate, challenge, and move my students to find their voice in writing and to be able to pen the pages of their lives with exuberance so that they are able as Dan Kirby states, “...to concentrate on letting their eyes be the camera and their paper be the picture” of their hearts.

Background

I love being a teacher at Torrence Creek Elementary School. Our school places a high emphasis on rigor, relevance, and differentiation as we seek to find ways to meet the

educational need of each individual student, giving credence to their learning styles and recognizing that they must be motivated and challenged to reach their full potential, emerging as vibrant and unique as the colors displayed on the mountains in fall. Lucy Calkins exemplifies our school when she says, “What’s necessary is education that requires high input from both children and teachers. This rigorous balance is best achieved when curriculum involves both ongoing structures and changing units of study and when the curriculum provides the context for constant assessment based instruction.” Our minority population is small; however, I am very fortunate to have a high performing, diverse class this year. My class is comprised of three African Americans, seventeen European-Americans, two Israelis, and two students who were adopted a year ago: one from China and one from Russia. As we begin to write about life experiences, the world becomes smaller and our lives are greatly enriched by the lives of our students from around the world. While reading, researching, and creating this unit on change I created an Acrostic poem to share with students.

CHANGES

Closing chapters
Having courage and strength
Anticipating adventures
Never forgetting memories
Growing amidst pain
Eager to see rainbows and open windows

Rationale

In their article entitled, “Teaching the Features of Effective Writing” Kim Bowen and Kathleen Cali state that,

Teaching writing is hard and often frustrating. For decades, teachers have assigned writing, graded it, and watched pages covered in red ink stuffed into the backs of notebooks, never to be read again. Many teachers admit to being uncomfortable teaching writing in the first place; while early grades teacher education programs spend hours upon hours on teaching reading, they spend far less time on teaching writing.

In my opinion, writing is one of the most important skills teachers can help their students develop for it truly changes lives. It is the thread that ties together all the curriculum areas. In the article “Inside Out” the author explains that,

All kids have language inside their heads. That stream of feelings and remembrances and hurts and people and successful moments and colossal failures is all up there in their heads. The journal, because it’s private, protected place,

becomes an invitation to open up, to explore, and to dip into the stream of language. Good journal writing is like fishing in the river of your mind.

This curriculum unit is designed to integrate writing with the teaching of literature, social studies, and science so that writing is being taught throughout the curriculum. The integration of these content areas is tied together with the thread of writing which is woven tightly around the theme of “change”.

Writing helps students express thoughts deep from within the soul of all ages, genders, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. I agree with Bonnie Friedman, “Successful writers are not the ones who write the best sentences. They are the ones who keep writing. They are the ones who discover what is most important and strangest and most pleasurable in themselves, and keep believing in the value of their work, despite the difficulties.” It is important for teachers to teach students to be like the train in the *Little Engine that Could* and keep pushing up the mountain believing they can make it to become the writer they want to be!

This unit is important for my class and for others because it seeks to engage learners in the rigorous process of digging deep into their souls and learning how changes impact all areas of their lives and to make connections among families, communities, animals, and plants by analyzing and writing informally about each, while strengthening their minds and hands as they fill the empty pages of their journals and mini books with stories from their lives and observations they have made.

Objectives

I believe Carol Avery makes a great point when she stresses the high priority teachers should place on *trust* in the classroom. She defines trust as “valuing the learner as a human being, as one who has much to give, much to demonstrate, much to teach others. Trust is esteeming the learner so that self-esteem is enhanced. Trust is believing that all children can learn to read and write and that all children strive continually to make sense of the world.”

In his book *Craft Lessons*, well known writer Ralph Fletcher states that in order for students to develop into fluent writers they must have time to write, as well as the time for teachers to respond to their writing. For their writing fluency to reach full potential, students must be given the responsibility for their own decisions. He also encourages the reader to use literature to model writing strategies and last but not of least importance he says the writer’s notebook is important for aiding in the author’s growth. To his points the NCSCOS has objectives which correlate with his statements.

Literacy

Students are to elaborate on how events connect to life experiences. They are also to share personal experiences by recording personal written responses. Another objective for literacy is for the learner to create a visual text. The students will demonstrate this by composing their own innovative poem about change. In the article, “Inside Out Strategies for Teaching Writing” the author discusses the need for writers to develop their own voice in writing. Thus, another objective students will accomplish is that as the unit is taught and writing takes place, students will develop their own voices as writers. One of my favorite articles from our seminar is called “Dear Fellow Writer”. In her letter Pat Mora encourages my aspiration to be a writer and teacher of writing by sharing,

Whether we write for ourselves or to share our words, we discover ourselves when we truly write: when we dive below the surface. It’s never easy to really reveal ourselves in school, but remember that writing is practice. Without practice, you will never learn to hear and sing your own unique song.”

Upon meeting the objectives I hope all students will be “singing” beautifully using their own special voices!

Social Studies

Integrating curriculum is an essential part of educating students and thus some of the Social Studies objectives which students will write about are to describe personal and family changes past and present. They will also describe past and present changes in our local community. Comparing and contrasting the changes in the local community with the communities around the world is also another objective. Finally, students will recognize how members of the community are affected by changes in the community over time.

Science

In Science students will conduct investigations and make observations to build an understanding of the needs of living organisms. Students will make connections through written language by writing their observations of how plants change over time. Students will write the steps for organizing and designing a terrarium. The same plants will also be planted outside and students will observe the changes in both environments. A Science journal will be kept and students will make a Venn diagram to compare and contrast both changes. Next, students will hypothesize about how the environments affected the growth of the plants. Finally, students will write a story comparing themselves to either the plants in the terrarium or the plants outside. They will discuss the needs of humans and plants and what the effects were if those needs were or were not being met.

Insects also experience changes in their lives. After participating in a SMART board lesson on the life cycles of the Luna moth, the honeybee, and the dragonfly students will

use the computer to write a power point presentation of the life cycle of an insect of their choice. Each slide will be a detailed description of the stages in the insect's life. Finally, the conclusion slide will be an analysis of how the insect's life is harder or easier than that of humans and why.

Strategies

I'm learning through research and experience that the advice Lucy Calkins gives in *Nuts and Bolts of Writing*, "the most creative environments in our society are not the kaleidoscope environments in which everything is always changing and complex. They are instead, the predictable and consistent ones." Students need consistency and need to view writing as a crock pot not a microwave. Their thoughts and ideas need to simmer over time and not merely cook in an instant. Ralph Fletcher explains that, "learning to write is a slow-growth process." I myself can attest to that piece of advice having personally seen that to be true in my own life as well as the lives of my students. Each of us has been uniquely gifted: however, we are also to challenge ourselves to expand our talents and abilities. It is our job as educators to nurture, motivate, and encourage our students as they stretch, change, and grow!

Mini Lessons

Routine when students write is essential in developing a writing program. Teachers daily begin with mini lessons which teach writing strategies. The teacher models each of the lessons demonstrating how teachers are writers too. Katie Wood Ray believes that teachers should teach from an inquiry stance which means that teachers should,

Ask students to read like writers, ensure that the content for writing is grounded in the realities of both product and process, expand the teacher's knowledge base as she learns alongside students, helps students develop vision for writing before they're asked to engage in revision, and model the process of writing, rather than create a model for what the writing should look like when it's all finished.

Ralph Fletcher has a book entitled *Craft Lessons* which identifies important lessons students should learn in order to develop their writing. As students learn basic concepts needed for writing, they continually cycle through the concepts throughout the year, integrating the reading of literature, science, or social studies with reading like a writer.

Writer's Notebook/Mini Books

As students write in their writer's notebook the teacher moves around the room conferencing with students and asking questions about their writing. Katie Wood Ray stresses,

‘When students are just writing on their own in writing workshops, they must learn to answer the essential question, *what have you read that is like what you are trying to write?* This is why we teach our youngest writers in first grade to answer this question very simply as ‘I’m making a book.’ A book is something they know, so we staple a few pages together so it looks like a book and ask them to make books like the picture books we are reading to them.”

Students are able to write about their life experiences. In addition to their mini books students keep a writer’s notebook in which they keep writing ideas, topics, pictures, and lists of words they may want to use in their writing. Ralph Fletcher has written a book entitled *A Writer’s Notebook Unlocking the Writer within You*, and in it he outlines ways to use the notebook. He explains that some students get “stuck” when it comes to writing. The notebook is to the writer what the blanket is to Linus in the Peanuts comic strip. The notebook is the keeper of memories for the writer. Fletcher states that “The writer’s notebook works just like an incubator: a protective place to keep your infant idea safe and warm, a place for it to grow while it is too young, too new, to survive on its own.” During writer’s workshop the students may either write in their notebook or make mini books containing their stories. Some students may want to begin their stories in the notebook itself. As students write the teacher becomes the coach realizing that mistakes in writing are roads to success. UNCC professor Lil Brannon taught our “Writing for Your Life” seminar fellows to see, “Errors are signs of progress not something to be avoided.” As coaches, teachers need to embrace the writing process and ask thought provoking to spur students on to the finish line for which they are striving.

Conferencing and Coaching

A coach listens, observes, questions, and encourages while conferencing. ...*And with a Light Touch* is a book written by Carol Avery. In her book she includes a detailed account of how important it is to ask valuable questions in the conference. She includes forms needed when conferencing with students. As their writing takes place Lucy Calkins states that, “I came to understand that integration is not something I as a teacher plan and implement, but rather something that occurs within learners. When curriculum units are broadly framed and begin with the children, building on what they know, connections between all the disciplines occur.”

In this unit I hope that students will naturally be able to make the connections across the curriculum as we discuss and write about the changes occurring throughout the subject areas.

Literature as Mentor Texts

In order for students to reach their full potential as writers it is vital that they read and use favorite stories as mentor texts for their own writing. Through reading students begin to

choose their own style of writing thus making it easier for their own voice to emerge as they begin to write. Students will be given a variety of literature in order to enhance their writing palette and allow them to view the variety and styles available for them to emulate as they struggle to develop a unique writing voice.

Implementation of Strategies

Students will be working in writer's workshop on mini books about their families. They will have looked at photographs and will conduct interviews discussing family history. Students will also think about the timelines of their life and will use memoirs and other stories as mentor texts to write their own memoirs about their life.

Poetry

Poetry is a powerful tool for writers to express thoughts and feelings. Students will use poetry to portray moments of time, providing the reader glimpses into the window of their life changed by growth and passing years.

Pen Pals/Technology

I want my students to explore various cultures, traditions, and understand differing world views. Writing can play a key role in unlocking the door of exploration and research into our community and communities around the world. Through the use of technology (the computer and SMART board) students will learn about children around the world or in other schools in our learning community. They will become pen pals and seek to understand cultural and community differences. In writing to other students their cultural awareness will increase and they are able to develop a different writing technique that is very useful in life. Students will learn about the changes their pen pals have experienced in their lives in comparison to their own changes which have taken place.

Guest Speakers

Having guest speakers share their knowledge of the community also enlarges the student's perspective of the community around them. The mayor, town councilmen, city manager, or school board representative can provide unique perspectives concerning changes which have occurred within the community. They may provide movies, video clips or pictures depicting changes which have taken place. Being able to respond by making books about life in their community now and long ago helps students bring to light the value they place on various parts of our community.

Non-Fiction Mini Books

Reading and writing non-fiction material about changes in plants and animals is important as students grow as writers. Students will read non-fiction books about plants and animals. They will make observations about plant life and record the information in their own mini book.

Author's Chair

At the end of each workshop, two students will share their writing while sitting in the author's chair. When a student finishes there will be two positive compliments or observations made about the author's piece of writing. The teacher is to keep track of the students who have shared and make sure everyone has a chance to demonstrate their ability as a writer.

Play- "A Kaleidoscope of Change"

As an end of the year culminating assessment, students will be divided into groups and will write a play entitled "A Kaleidoscope of Change" highlighting the information they obtained about the theme of change. Parents will be invited to celebrate the changes and growth demonstrated in the play the students will have written. Watching students grow from the tadpole stage of writing...using two or three word sentences...to emerging as young frogs...developing a story line and entertaining the reader with compelling thoughts and vivid images is a delight to behold. We will rejoice together as students share the kaleidoscope of their lives in stories, songs, poetry, and artwork depicting their writing. Just like the leaves in autumn come to an end but the colors stay embedded in our memories...I hope family and friends will observe the changing colors of growth in the seasons of my students' writing life.

Classroom Activities

Literacy Lessons

Title: "Changes" Poem

Objective: Students will compose their own innovative poem about change.

Activity: Mini Lesson (Mentor Texts)

Materials: writing rug, paper, *Chrysanthemum*

Students will be called to the "Writing Rug" as the teacher sings the following song to the tune of "Are You Sleeping":

Authors gather, authors gather

Please sit down, please sit down

We'll learn about our writing, learn about our writing

Gather round, gather round.

The teacher will discuss what change means and have students describe changes in their lives. She will read the mentor text *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes. Students will

discuss and create a visual organizer of the changes demonstrated by the main character of the story. The teacher will read her personal acrostic poem about “Changes”. After reviewing how to write an acrostic poem, students will be encouraged to either write an acrostic poem for the word change or they may write an acrostic poem using their own name and describing changes they have experienced using the letters of their name.

Title

Memorable Memoirs

Objective

Students will share personal experiences with texts by recording personal responses

Activity

Writing a Memoir (Mini Books or Writer’s Notebook)

The teacher will read *When I Was Little: A Memoir of a Four -Year –Olds Memoir of Her Youth* by Jamie Lee Curtis, *When I Was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant or *Painted Words/Spoken Memories* by Alike. The class will make a timeline together of events that took place in the life of one of the main characters. As a group changes and stages of life will be evaluated. Students will return to their seats after the teacher chants...

“Writers start...have some fun...look those stories have just begun!”

Students will either make lists, pictures, or words about important events in their life in their writer’s notebook or they will begin writing their own memoir in a mini book. The teacher will walk around and conference with students. Asking questions and spending time listening to the writer becomes the goal as the teacher conferences with students. At the end of writer’s workshop the teacher will choose a couple of students to share their memoirs with the class by using the Author’s Chair. Carol Avery in her book “...And with a Light Touch” describes the process she uses for implementing Author’s Chair. The student who is sharing will sit in the specified chair. After listening to the writer, two students will share positive comments about the writing trying to use comments that reflect items they have learned in mini lessons and see demonstrated in the writing of the student sharing.

Ralph Fletcher reflects, “In my writer’s notebook I often go back, spading into the soil of my past life, trying to unearth the person I once was.” As a writer he says it is important to “...pay attention to the feelings connected to it: cozy, fearful, sad. Exploring a memory includes looking into not only what happened but also how it affected you then, and how it affects you now.” After the students have written their memoirs, the teacher can share the above quotes from Mr. Fletcher and have them

analyze whether or not their writing reflected their feelings and thoughts. If not they may want to add those things during the next writer's workshop.

Social Studies

Title

Focusing on Your Family

Objectives

The students will describe family changes that take place in the past and in the present. The students will compose a letter.

Activity

Grandparent Interviews/Letter Writing

Day 1: The teacher will bring a basket filled with special memorable items that remind her of family events she experienced. She will share them with the class. Afterwards she will share the story *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox and the students will summarize the items that helped her remember the events in her life. They will then brainstorm items that remind them of events that occurred in the lives of their parents and grandparents. They will be asked to write a list of questions about life changes that they would like to ask their grandparent or another senior adult.

Day 2: The teacher will read the story *Dear Annie* by Judith Caseley. The class will analyze the changes that took place in the life of Annie and her grandfather. Students will be taught how to write a personal letter. They will review the letters corresponded between the two family members. Students will be asked to compose a letter to a grandparent and will include at least three questions they wrote from the day before. They will also ask them to attend a class Grandparent Tea in their honor.

Day 3: The class will sponsor a Grandparent Tea to honor and learn about the past from their elders. Students will ask their grandparents to share stories about how life has changed from when they were in school. They will ask their grandparents what changes they predict will occur in the future. After the tea, the students will write a narrative about what they learned at the tea. They will share their thoughts about how their family's lives have changed over time and the predictions they have for the future.

Title

Community Changes

Objectives

The students will compare and contrast the changes in the local community with the communities around the world. The students will identify how members of the community are affected by changes in the community over time.

Activities

Presentations, Pen Pals, and Personalities

Day 1: The class will be introduced to a guest speaker such as the mayor, town councilman, city manager, or school board member who has seen or knows about the many changes which have occurred in the community. The speaker will share a speech, video, pictures, or power point presentation about how the community has changed over time. The students will ask questions about the changes and will take notes in their writer's notebook as the guest speaker shares the information. After the speaker leaves the students will allow their paper to become their canvas as they transform it into the community of the past correctly depicting the changes in the community. As they write and illustrate the changes that have occurred they are to describe how the changes have affected their lives today.

Day 2: The teacher will read the story *Amber on the Mountain* by Tony Johnston. The story describes a young girl who learns to read from a friend she met over the summer. Unfortunately, the girl has to move away and the two want to communicate with one another. She surprises her new pen pal by learning how to write so that they can stay in touch. After reading the story the class will predict and summarize the changes that took place in the story. They will brainstorm ways they can learn and questions they may want to ask their pen pal. Students will write a letter telling their pen pal about a time when they either moved or changed grade levels and how that even changed them. They are to think of questions to ask in order to learn about changes their pen pal has experienced.

Day 3: Before students listen to the true story called *Ruby's Wish* by Shirin Yim Bridges, they may predict what Ruby's wish may be. The teacher will read the story depicting a young lady in China who wanted nothing more than to receive a college education that was usually denied to women. In the story students will be exposed to prejudice against women and the differences in the Asian culture and those in North America. After reading the story the students are to write their opinion as to how their grandfather's decision not only impacted Ruby's life but the life of women for the following generations. They will make a mini book describing a change that has take place that has affected a race, gender, or age group in a positive or negative way. They must describe the event analyzing how it personally impacted them.

Science

Title

Changes and Correlations in Plants and Insects

Objective

Students will investigate and make observations about the needs of plants.

Students will observe ways in which humans are similar to other organisms.

Activity

Testing Terrariums and Planted Plants

Students will be divided into five teams. Teams will brainstorm various plants they would like to use to plant and observe the growth. Students will write a “How To” manual for designing their terrarium. They will plant the same type of plants in the garden and in the terrarium. Students will water the plants they planted but not the plants in the terrarium. They will keep a mini book recording the daily observations concerning the changes in both sets of plants. After two weeks of observations the students will evaluate the needs of plants and if the needs were met in the experiment conducted. They will write a summary of the results and will identify which environment provided for more of the needs of the plants.

Activity

Inspecting Insects

The teacher will read the story *The Diary of a Fly* by Doreen Cronin. They will observe and as a class make notes about the characteristics of the fly. A Venn diagram will be used to compare and contrast the fly and humans. The teacher will describe and explain how to keep a diary. Students will then write their own *Diary of a Human* using the book they just heard as a model or mentor text.

Ralph Fletcher describes a craft lesson in which students “Reveal the Inside Story”. Students will think about the story they just heard and will think about what they were learning and feeling as the story was read...that is what happened inside of the students. The “outside of the story” is the plot of the story...what happened to the characters. As students are creating their diary they are to work to include the “inside” and “outside” of the diary for the readers. This means that the writer will describe the thoughts and

feelings (insides) they have as well as the events and characters (outsides) that are relevant in their lives.

Activity: The Voice of the Insect

Teaching students to develop their own voice in their writing is an important skill. In order for students to develop their voice they should pretend they are sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast with their close friend. What would they be saying and how would they be talking? Ralph Fletcher says writing is “chatting on paper.” He states that, “instead of speaking out loud you let your voice speak on the paper.” After discussing a writer’s voice in a mini lesson, the teacher will ask students to read nonfiction books, computer information, or magazines about an insect of their choice. When they have finished reading and gathering facts about the insect they will use their voice and write a story in the first person as if they are the insect they researched. Facts and information is to be written and shared using their voice in the writing.

Culminating Activity

Class Play

Title

“A Kaleidoscope of Change”

Objective

The students will apply strategies to create or compose a variety of written products.

Activity

Crafting the “Kaleidoscope of Change”

Materials

Clothing and props for each stage of life (birth – age 7), mural of our community or slide show of past and present, pen pal letters and pictures, plant illustrations on poster board, insect outfits

The definition of a kaleidoscope is a “complex set of events or objects.” Change is defined as “to make or become different.” Students will be told that they are to create a play which identifies the complex set of events they discovered when they were taught how people, communities, plants, and animals became different over time. Students will be divided into five teams/curriculum areas. Each team will focus on a different curriculum area of change.

Team 1 (Literacy): They will concentrate on writing a play depicting the stages of change throughout a child's life. They will chronologically write about the developmental milestones they accomplish. When they perform their part of the performance, each student will dress and have props for the specific age about which they are describing.

Team 2 (Social Studies/Art): This team will create a visual representation of the community changes that have taken place over the years. They will write a narrative as well as design a mural depicting how the land, schools, and town are different from long ago.

Team 3 (Social Studies/Literacy): This team will write an acrostic poem about what change means to them and how it has affected students in our school as well as children around the world. They will each read one of their pen pal letters which they wrote. They will read a written narrative describing what they learned about students in another grade level, school, and city.

Team 4 (Science/Music): Students in this team will write a song and create posters depicting what they learned as they studied plants. They will decide a tune to use and will write the words to describe the needs which need to be met in caring for plants.

Team 5 (Science): Students will dress up as an insect they researched. Using the first person voice, they will each describe their life as that insect. Students will recite their writing pretending to be that insect.

The class will recite an acrostic poem about changes which they have previously written and memorized.

The group will sing a "Changes" song they wrote together to the tune of "The Ants Go Marching". The song integrating all the skills learned across the curriculum will be sung as the ending to the presentation.

Conclusion

On the first day of school Chris walked up to me and boldly stated, "Mrs. Peachey, I am not an ordinary boy!" Oh how I loved that exclamation! The confidence and pride with which he exemplified himself was very powerful and assuring. Max Lucado, one of my favorite authors wrote an incredible book called, *You Are Special*. The story makes the point that each person is special and has unique talents and abilities. As writers, we may emulate those authors we admire but our ultimate goal is to develop our own unique voice and style. The characteristic of fall that makes it so vivid and beautiful is the variety of colors that blend together to make a kaleidoscope of colors depicting the

changing season. Correspondingly, each writer is valuable and I hope that each teacher will allow students to develop their own voice that will make them distinct. Alan Ashley-Pitt makes a great point by saying, "You have two choices in life: you can dissolve into the mainstream or you can be distinct. To be distinct, you must be different. To be different, you must strive to be what no one else but you can be." I agree with my student Chris, we all need to be extraordinary in the words we share for they truly are the windows to our souls whose colors may reflect the changing seasons of our lives!