

Asking Questions is the Answer – Big Questions Unit

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Background

“Sometimes our students are encouraged to answer ‘but why?’ and ‘what if?’ but philosophical inquiry is rarely expected before college. Research shows that engaging with complex thought experiments and wrestling with answers to ‘big questions’ markedly improves students’ critical thinking skills as well as their understanding of history and culture.”

This was the description of the CTI course that I wanted to participate in. When I first read the description, I knew that this CTI course was for me. It fascinated me for several reasons. The main reason is that I want my students to critically think. One of our course standards is for our students to critically think, but then the students are tested in a standardized format and teachers are judged according to those scores. These two things contrast each other in my opinion, but it may be a part of teaching that won’t ever change. However, I know that if I teach my students to think critically, then I have made them smarter and helped them for their future. This is exactly the reason I wanted to incorporate this Big Question Unit into my classroom.

I teach 9th grade English at a high school in Cornelius, North Carolina. My students are primarily white students who, for the most part, very much care about their grades and their learning. Their parents are also very much invested in their learning. This unit will be used in my Honors class, which is a semester long and taught with block scheduling or 90 minutes per class period. Having a class for just a semester makes it seem like we are always in a time crunch to teach everything we need or want. In North Carolina, the ninth grade teachers are required to teach many different genres including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. This is in addition to grammar and writing. We aren’t told how to teach these texts (thank goodness!); just that it needs to be done. In my classroom, we focus on these genres for about three to four weeks at a time. For example, we do fiction for the first four week of school, then we do nonfiction for three weeks, poetry for three weeks, and drama for three weeks. After that, we review all of these genres before the semester is finished.

I enjoy studying the genres and focusing heavily on them for a couple weeks, but I wanted a better way to tie them all together at the end of the semester. Each genre is significant for students to understand, but I didn’t have a culminating project that allowed my students to demonstrate to me that they understood how to analyze and use each

genre. In this unit, they are able to do so. Essentially they are pulling together everything they have learned throughout the semester. This is a terrific way to make sure my students understand all of these genres and texts and for me to gauge their learning.

In addition to teaching these genres, I have several standards that I need to teach my students. One is students should “determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details.” After we read each text, we will discuss the theme as a Big Question. This year we were lucky enough to receive new textbooks by Holt McDougal that include the Common Core State Standards. One of the most useful parts about this new textbook is that it has a central question for each text that students are to focus on, and the central question relates with the theme. We discuss these Big Questions before we read the text, and then students discuss and analyze when we are finished reading. For example, the Big Question for the short story “The Scarlet Ibis” is “why do we hurt the ones we love?” We discuss as a whole class why this is so. It is usually done in a journal prompt at the beginning of class or perhaps the next day so they can relate the story to the journal prompt. This topic is something teenagers can definitely relate to because often times they are mean to family members, so we discuss why this happens. Then, when we are finished with the story, the students analyze this theme and how it affected the characters and plot. They discuss why it was that the narrator was mean to his brother and what the consequences of this are. Finally, we come back to analyzing why this happens in our own lives and how we can relate to the narrator. Having this central Big Question is a wonderful way to focus my students during the reading of the text. Understanding and analyzing a theme is an imperative skill to teach my students. “Students demonstrate understanding of text while actively engaged in reading or listening to stories, dramas, and poems for clearly stated purposes” is another standard for ninth grade English. After focusing heavily on theme, students certainly have a better understanding of what a theme is, but they also learn how to analyze and think about it in terms of a Big Life Question. They can apply these questions not only to their own life but also to different texts throughout the year.

After we read the text and analyze the Big Question, then I have my students examine even more Big Questions that can be discussed with that particular text. Students will work in their groups (I set my desks in groups of four) to come up with at least 5 Big Questions that can be applied to the text. Then we write them all on the board, and students are expected to write all of the questions down in their Writer’s Notebook. This allows them to see many other Big Questions that could be analyzed with that text, and it also gives them more questions to consider for their final project, a multigenre paper. Students may write in their journals about these questions throughout the semester. By the end of the semester, students will have a list of hundreds of Big Questions. We will discuss some of these in length, but some of them are just meant to spark interest in students.

This may be a good place to write what exactly I mean by a “Big Question.” To me, a Big Question is something that can be applied to life, but we analyze it often in our literature. One of our Big Questions after reading the short story “Marigolds” is “What would you do if life had a reset button?” We could analyze that question with the characters in the story, but we could also apply it to other texts and to our own lives. Another objective of a Big Question is that it cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no” answer, and there most likely is not a “right” answer. It should be something that is debatable, and I encourage these questions to be debated. Mary Anne Neal states in “Engaging Students through Effective Questions” that “asking an open-ended question (sometimes called a divergent question) is a way to elicit discussion, brainstorm solutions to a problem, or create opportunities for thinking outside the box. The highest-order open-ended questions engage students in dynamic thinking and learning, where they must synthesize information, analyze ideas and draw their own conclusions (Neal 2011)”¹ The highest levels of question asking in Bloom’s Taxonomy is analyzing and synthesizing, so we want our students to constantly ask these types of questions if we want them to be think critically and think outside of the box. I believe these Big Questions will allow lots of opportunities for students to think critically.

Another standard this unit addresses is students must “write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.” The culminating activity, a multigenre paper, will allow my students to examine a Big Question that they are interested in. There is an explanation of this multigenre paper later in this unit. It requires a great deal of organization and analysis of at least three different texts.

Writing is obviously an important part of English, but I also feel it is vital to all other subjects and especially for students who want to attend college, which all of my students want to do. If students do not know how to write for different purposes or how to write in general, they will have difficulties and struggle for the rest of their lives. They must be able to put their ideas and research in writing. One of the best parts about the multigenre paper is that it allows students to write in all different genres and in many different ways. We will do some of the writing in class and definitely help each other through the process. Students must “develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.” One of the most important aspects of teaching writing is that Writing is a Process. It is not something that can be done in one draft. Even as I am writing this unit, I have revised and edited several different times and on several different days. If I don’t teach my students this, I definitely think I failed as a Writing/English teacher.

Another belief I have about writing is that writing is never really complete. There can always be more that can be done. This is also why I feel some sort of peer editing needs

to be done. When I say peer editing, I don't mean I want my students to edit like I as their teacher would edit their papers. I want my students to be able to help each other make sure they are focused on the topic and things of that nature. They can help each other with ideas, organization, and sometimes with grammar. In ninth grade students must "initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively." I want my students to talk to each other about their Big Questions, so they can help each other write their multigenre papers and also just discuss these Big Life Questions. I think it is essential that students learn how to collaborate and interact. No matter what field students go into for their job, they must be able to work as a team and to talk to people. Even if someone sits in a cubicle all day, they must be able to interact with the person who hires them and with other peers at work periodically. Teaching my students to work together is vital if I want my students to succeed in life. This is something that takes practice for sure.

Many educators feel that writing helps develop critical thinking skills, and I agree with this as well. Writing is a place where students are able to criticize texts and support their opinions with facts and details. Rebekah Peeples Massengill worked with her sociology students to develop critical thinking skills. She developed an assignment "in a writing-intensive course, which challenges students to use common course texts to interpret evidence they have found in an outside setting-including TV shows, movies, and newspaper reports" (Massengill 2011)ⁱⁱ. She found this was a technique that helped develop critical thinking skills, and in one way is like my Multigenre Project because students analyze texts and compare them to each other. Students can also apply their Big Question to any genre such as a movie, TV show, etc. Massengill also states that

In particular, asking students to make their *own* arguments is a critical moment of interaction between the writing process and higher-level thinking, in which authority lies not with a source but with the thinker's application of a set of ideas. Accordingly, a key curriculum goal for deep learning concerns helping students begin to cultivate skills in independent thinking by developing their own thesis statement, supporting that thesis with logical rationale and appropriate evidence, and presenting the thesis in a convincing fashion, either orally or in writing (Massengill 2011)ⁱⁱⁱ

I completely agree with Massengill and her take on critical thinking. Critical thinking is a term thrown around at school all the time, but how do we know our students are critically thinking? One reason for this Multigenre Paper is that it allows students to ask their own question, to support it with evidence, and to present it in a unique but convincing way. This is one way for students to critically think.

When students leave my classroom, I want them to remember what we did. I know they won't remember all of the grammar and all of the stories we read, but they might

remember a novel or story that affected them in some way. They might remember that their crazy English teacher was obsessed with Michigan State and wrote strange comments on her tests and quizzes. I want them to remember some conversations we had. I want them to leave class remembering that they questioned important topics in class. I want them to remember the debate about When do people mature? What makes someone evil? How does innocence shatter? If they can remember those Big Questions and discussions, they might leave my classroom asking even more Big Questions. They might be reminded years from now about a question we analyzed in class while they watch a movie with their friends. If a child leaves my class asking just one Big Question and talking to his parents or to his friends about it, I feel like I have done my job and made my student question the world.

Part of the reason the education system could be failing our children is because we want our students to be like little robots: taking notes, writing essays, listening to the teacher at all times. I want my students to take notes and write essays, and listen to me of course, but more importantly, I want them to question the world around them. I want them to realize that they don't have to listen to all rules if the rules don't make sense. They should be questioning at school, at home, and in life. If our students aren't asking questions, what types of citizens will they be?

Rationale: Why Big Questions?

“Once you get your fingers on the important questions, you can't turn away from them.”
Morrie Schwartz from *Tuesdays with Morrie*

This is a memorable quote from my favorite novel, *Tuesdays with Morrie*. In fact, we are going to be reading this text this year and asking Big Questions from it. The main project, the Multigenre Paper, will be done after reading this text because there are so many Big Questions to think about throughout the text.

As an educator, I feel it is my responsibility to make my students so interested in asking questions that they can't ever stop. In my school district, there is an enormous focus on standardized testing. I teach a subject that has an End of Course test that students must pass not only to get credit for my class but to also graduate high school. In addition, this test is worth 25% of the students' overall grade. Not only do parents worry about this test, but so do my students, especially my Honors students who feel the need to get an A so they can keep their grades up and get into a great college. On one hand, I do feel like I need to help my students do well on this test because they care so much about their grade and because they will have to take so many tests in their lives. But on the other hand, I feel I need to do much more for them in regards to critically thinking if they are going to succeed in college, and I want to make sure they are getting that in their education.

These tests make it very difficult to teach students to critically think and to also be creative. Students are used to tests with only four answer choices. In addition, many teachers use multiple choice tests because they have forty students in a classroom, and multiple choice tests are much easier to grade. Having to question the world and question literature in a multiple choice format, I believe, does not benefit the students. Because of this, I felt a need to create a unit that involves students actually doing the questioning. I wanted students to consider a question that may not even have an answer or an answer that every person can agree on. I wanted them to have a question that the student can grapple with throughout the school year, hopefully even a question that they talk to their friends or family about. I want them to leave my class wondering about this question, even if they never come up with an answer to it. It's the questioning that I want to focus on! Kathryn Carr states in "How Can We Teach Critical Thinking" that we as educators must "create an atmosphere where students are encouraged to read deeply, question, engage in divergent thinking, look for relationships among ideas, and grapple with real life issues (Carr 1990)"^{iv} This is how students critically think in the classroom. Students cannot do this if they are being assessed with just multiple choice questions; however, they can do this if we are constantly asking these Big Questions, and they will do this in their final project, a Multigenre Paper.

Rationale- Why a multigenre paper? (What the heck is a multigenre paper?)

When I was in college, I had an amazing professor in one of my English education classes. The class was focused mostly on the teaching of writing in middle and high school English classes. My professor's name was Dr. Dornan, and she had many creative and wonderful ideas for projects and essays that she taught us how to incorporate in our classes when we became teachers. We had to write all of them for the class, so we could understand what our students were going to have to go through. It changed the way I viewed the teaching of writing. I have used several of her ideas in my classroom each year, but I hadn't done one my favorite projects yet. The final project I want my students to attempt is a Multigenre Paper.

Blending Genre, Altering Style by Tom Romano

After learning about and having to write a Multigenre paper in my college class, my professor told us about this book, *Blending Genre, Altering Style* by Tom Romano. I just had to have it. It is a book on how to teach and incorporate a multigenre paper in the classroom, but it also gives countless ideas for how to get students to write in different genres. I highly recommend this book, and I will take many quotes and activities from it to incorporate into my rationale and into my lesson plan.

A multigenre paper involves many different genres focused on one single topic (for our multigenre paper, it would be about a Big Question). The novel *Monster* is kind of like a Multigenre paper; it is set up with dialogue, movie script, journals, and narrative

writing. Romano describes it as “each genre is a color slide, complete in itself, possessing its own satisfying composition, but also working in concert with the others to create a single literary experience (Romano 2000)”.^v Therefore, each piece could work on its own, but the final product has all the pieces working together to focus on one idea or Big Question. What I love about this project is that my students can incorporate all of the different genres we focused on (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama) while also focusing on a Big Question that they are interested in. Some types of genres students could do are dialogue, journal entries, movie script, a collage, a cartoon, poetry, a recipe, an eyewitness account, a newspaper article, a letter, a wanted poster, a dream, and many more. Kathryn Carr believes that one method of incorporating critically thinking in the classroom is to compare different texts with a questioning attitude (Carr 1990).^{vi} Because I am having students ask these Big Questions throughout several of their texts and because students must compare these using different genres, it is a critical thinking method.

The first section of the project is an Opener or Introduction. Romano says, “Students should think about creating an opening piece that’s reader-friendly, informative, and engaging...I ask students to write a preface, foreword, or introduction that contextualizes the topic of their paper. Writers might tell about the genesis of the paper or of the importance of its subject matter” (Romano 2000).^{vii} This is where students are going to write about the Big Question they chose, giving background information about why this question stumped them or interested them. It will give the readers information about what to expect in their project, so we know what to look for in their writing. This is also a valuable place for students to write informative writing and to practice all of the writing skills and grammar they have learned throughout the whole year. (We do a great deal of writing and grammar throughout the year!) It is also a good place for some metacognition. Kathryn Carr states, “Since the term ‘metacognition’ was coined by John Flavell in the 1970s, the concept has become an important part of the ongoing dialogue about student learning. Metacognition -- i.e., an individual’s awareness of his or her thought processes -- requires an ability to stand back and observe oneself” (Carr 1990).^{viii} The student can explain the thought process that happened throughout the project and throughout the semester. Metacognition is an important skill which allows students to understand why they think their thoughts and how they came to those thoughts.

This project is also a wonderful space for students to explore and understand their use of tone. Tone is one of the literary terms we spend a sufficient amount of time analyzing in class. Author’s attitude is vital for students to understand, so they can analyze each text correctly. In addition, I want them to be able to write with a strong tone as well. Some students will chose a humorous tone, while others might be cynical, while others might be suspicious. They can and should choose a tone that works with their Big Question. I want my students to be able to keep their tone throughout the whole piece.

I definitely feel that my students need to be engaged in and practice with different genres throughout the semester. I want to give my students plenty of opportunities to work with different genres. I want them to first be able to understand and read them but then to be able to write their own. For example, during the fiction unit, students wrote a creative piece about a villain. We did a Mad Libs type of activity that made the villain strange or goofy in some way. This allowed my students to practice a fiction piece in a creative format. I grade the writing based on the grammar we have learned in class and also the way the students developed the character, because that is a big part of fiction. They can then use this writing and experience to assist them throughout the semester, with fiction writing but also any writing. Throughout the semester, I will give my students plenty of opportunities to practice writing in many different ways because of this.

Some people, including teachers, parents, and students, may feel wary of this multigenre paper because it is so open-ended. Tom Romano says, “Imagination is a way of knowing” (Romano 2000).^{ix} I agree with him because I think using one’s imagination does enable students to know and understand in a unique way other than just writing a research paper or answering questions. Some students may struggle with the open-endedness of the multigenre format. This could definitely be a problem for some of my students, as they want an exact format to follow. Showing them examples of multigenre papers may even make them more frustrated because all of them will be special and varied. However, Romano says, “Such cognitive struggle, I contend, enhances and deepens intellectual and emotional development. The multigenre paper offers students the opportunity to take part in the production of texts that are driven by narrative thinking, to try out the lenses of poets, fiction writers, playwrights, and artists” (Romano 2000).^x I believe it is important for students to take on the lenses of all of these different people. It will help the students understand the world in a better way. Being able to use different lenses to analyze is a wonderful skill that should be emphasized in school. This cognitive struggle is a part of learning.

The multigenre paper can also be frustrating for those students who don’t think of themselves as “creative” or artsy. “I want students with more conventional analytical minds to expand their cognitive repertoire and rhetorical skills by gaining further experience with narrative thinking, with knowing the world through story, poem, and song, through imagery, metaphor, and symbol., I want uptight future engineers to learn to use a deft combination of fact and feeling, of the empirical and the imaginative” (Romano 2000).^{xi} Yes, this multigenre paper may be a struggle for some people with analytical minds. Isn’t a struggle the best way to learn? I don’t think learning should be easy. It should be difficult. It should be frustrating. It should be different from what has already been done. These multigenre papers allow the students to combine fact with imagination. They are able to get the best of both worlds! Just because a student isn’t normally considered “creative,” it doesn’t mean that student cannot be successful with this paper.

Being an effective teacher means I need my students to be able to use language appropriately and for many different reasons. Romano states:

As a language arts teacher, I am most concerned with students' development in using language. I want people to get better and better at it. Living with poetry can help that happen. Poetry is a place of precision and imagination in language. The genre requires visual thinking and exercises our capacity to synthesize, analyze, construct meaning, and feel emotion – a marvelous combination of cognition and affect. Poetry asks that we live metaphor, connect, associate, and experience epiphany. Poetry makes us focus (Romano 2000).^{xii}

This quote from Romano exemplifies how I feel about poetry. I believe poetry can influence in people in countless ways and make them much better writers and readers. Poetry is just one example of a text my students will write, but I think poetry is an essential part of English. Every other semester I have had my students analyze many different poems. I even have them write different poems. However, I've never had them incorporate poetry into a theme or Big Question. Doing so will allow them to understand and use poetry even better. Many of my students are frightened of poetry, and I want them to leave my class knowing that they can read and write poetry, and it does not have to be intimidating.

Romano gives varied, unique ways to incorporate poetry into the classroom and into their writing. One of these is found poetry. Found poetry uses prose from fiction or nonfiction, and it makes students think about and critique the effectiveness of the structure of poetry, which is a Standard all North Carolina teachers are supposed to teach. How this works is that students take some sort of prose, and they make that prose into poetry. They work with the structure of the poem. Students could be given the same prose, but the way they set up the poetry can be completely different. Having the structure set up differently can create a different poem, even though it's the same words. It is very remarkable way for students to see just how imperative the setup or structure of poetry is.

Another idea for poetry is a Poem for Two Voices. This has two different people talking throughout the poem. One narrator is on the left side, and an additional narrator is on the right side. Again, it focuses on the structure of the poem. The two narrators are talking, but they also share some lines throughout the poem. The two narrators end up sharing lines, but often times they are writing completely different ideas. It is a fascinating technique to write a poem, and students get very creative with this type of poetry. My students absolutely loved reading examples of these types of poems, and they were incredibly creative when writing them. I let them work with a partner to develop these poems. Some students wrote about Lennie and George from *Of Mice and Men*, and some students wrote about imaginary characters such as a mom and a teenage girl who

found out she was pregnant. I found that letting them pick their two characters made them even more creative with their poetry.

The last idea for poetry is using a Photograph Poem. The teacher could provide a picture or students could bring in pictures. Students will interpret it or describe pertinent information that isn't apparent in the picture alone. Students will all have different poems even though they were looking at the same photograph. Romano has many amazing examples of these poems which would be very helpful to show to students before they begin working with them. Even if students don't end up using the poems in their Multigenre paper, they had many different experiences with various techniques of poetry. They learn how important word choice and the structure of poetry are. I plan on showing my students all of these different types of poems and having them practice each type in class. The more poetry students are exposed to, the more comfortable they will be with poetry and the better they will be able to understand it.

In addition to analyzing their Big Question in at least two different texts we have read throughout the semester, students must apply that knowledge to a text we did not read in class. Rebekah Peoples Massengill states, "Developing students' skills of thinking and analysis represents a central goal of higher education. Ideally, the process of higher learning teaches students to approach evidence from multiple perspectives in order to arrive at their own well-reasoned arguments" (Massengill).^{xiii} I believe that having students analyze and compare their Big Question to all different types of texts helps them look at multiple perspectives throughout the year. It allows them to connect what they learned previously in a text to a new text.

Hopefully, I've shown the reasons for incorporating this unit into my classroom. It emphasizes critically thinking, analyzing Big Questions, analyzing different genres, and writing in different genres. It gives students a creative outlet in class, rather than just focusing on standardized testing. It also provides many opportunities for students to discuss with each other. English is all about Reading, Writing, Thinking, and Discussing. With any luck, when students leave my classroom they will be able to do all of these activities, and they will also be able to remember how to continue doing so even after they leave my classroom. The Unit goes throughout the whole semester, and I think it has a culminating activity that most students will enjoy. They may get frustrated throughout the process, but the end result will be positive. I'm looking forward to this unit!

Lessons

The next section includes some lessons that I do throughout my unit to encourage Big Question thinking from my students. As a teacher, I feel this part of my paper is the most helpful for other teachers so they can take the lessons as they are, grab ideas, or just edit some parts to fit their classrooms and students better. I love sharing my ideas with other

teachers because it is truly the best way to make our lessons creative and allow our students to learn in different ways. The first lesson is anticipation guides. The second lesson is the actual information sheet I give my students for their Multigenre Paper. It is A LOT of information, but it is all needed so students know why they are doing the project, what it will entail, and how it will be assessed.

Anticipation Guides

One of my students' favorite activities we do all year is anticipation guides. These guides have questions or ideas that will come up throughout the text we are about to read. I have students circle the number that best matches their viewpoint, and then I have students write about a few of them to get students thinking about their thinking (metacognition) and why they believe that way. Then, for each question, I have students stand around the room with the people who circled the same number they did. This allows the students to see what other people are thinking as well. Then we have a class discussion (the student who has the ball is the only one allowed to talk). Students love these discussions for many reasons: it allows them to share their ideas, walk around the room, and debate. The next two pages are two anticipation guides I use on a regular basis. They provide wonderful statements that could be turned into a Big Question for a multigenre paper.

Of Mice and Men Anticipation Guide

Circle the number that best represents your opinion or viewpoint. If you strongly agree, circle one. If you agree, circle 2. If you are unsure, circle three. If you disagree, circle 4. If you strongly disagree, circle 5. Then, pick three of these topics and on the back of this sheet, explain your reasoning in 3-5 sentences.

1. A true friend should tell you the truth, even if you don't want to hear it.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
2. The n-word is more offensive than other racial slurs because of the history of hate behind it.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
3. Women today are more often treated by men as equals rather than objects.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
4. When people are a victim of a crime, they should be able to take the law into their own hands.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
5. Women need more friends than men do.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

6. The best place for justice to be determined is in a court of law.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
7. Being rich is more important than having close friends.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
8. People who are mean to others do so because they are unhappy with their own lives.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
9. If someone has a dream or goal to strive for, s/he is more likely to survive struggles.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
10. People with mental disabilities deserve extra care: financially, mentally, and physically.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

Tuesdays with Morrie Anticipation Guide

Circle the number that best represents your opinion or viewpoint. Then, pick three of these topics and on the back . explain your reasoning in 3-5 sentences.

1. Love always wins.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
2. It is acceptable to feel sorry for yourself.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
3. Silence affects human relationships.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
4. People who are younger have more fun.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
5. Popular culture does not teach us to feel good about ourselves.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
6. Death is the center point of our lives.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
7. We are often unsatisfied with our lives.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

8. People often have meaningless lives.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
9. Our society is materialistic.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
10. Teachers influence us in many ways; sometimes it takes years to realize the impact.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
11. People should reject popular culture and create their own.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
12. Death is life's greatest lesson.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
13. The media has a negative impact on people.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
14. Sometimes you cannot believe what you see; you have to believe what you feel.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree
15. In order for someone to trust you, you must trust them.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

MULTIGENRE PAPER/PROJECT ON A BIG QUESTION?

*"Once you get your fingers on the important questions, you can't get away from them."
~Morrie Schwartz, Tuesdays with Morrie*

WHAT IS A BIG QUESTION?

Your Multigenre paper will be focused on one BIG QUESTION. We have been analyzing and discussing BIG QUESTIONS throughout class all semester. A BIG QUESTION is something that can be applied to life, and we analyze it often in our literature. Oftentimes it's the motive for why people read; we want to think about life's big questions and apply and connect them to our own lives. For example, one of our BIG QUESTIONS after reading the short story "Marigolds" was "What would you do if life had a reset button?" Another aspect of BIG QUESTIONS is that we can analyze that question with the characters in the story, but we can also apply it to other texts and to our own lives. An additional objective of a BIG QUESTION is that it cannot be answered

with a “yes” or “no” answer, and there most likely is not a “right” answer. It should be something that is debatable. You may come up with an answer to your Big Question, but your answer could be different than others who might study the question. *Tuesdays with Morrie* lends itself to countless BIG QUESTIONS (which is why we are doing this project after the novel- Duh! Ms. Brang is quite the planner!)

WHAT IS A MULTIGENRE PAPER?

It is a form of writing that extends your thinking, but in a way different from an essay. It is made up of many different parts or GENRES that you will create (YOU’LL CREATE EIGHT PIECES TOTAL.) Each piece or genre needs to be able to work by itself as a piece of writing, yet the pieces must also blend together to make a point about a particular BIG QUESTION. Taken together, the pieces FLOW from one idea to the next, connecting the theme or BIG QUESTION of your choice. This should not be a random collage of disjointed “stuff” (please excuse my use of a Dead Word here); you must connect the genres and what they represent with a central significant BIG QUESTION or theme of your paper. The paper as a whole looks like a collage.

As a whole, the pieces should comment on your BIG QUESTION in some way or another. It could comment on a contemporary event, reflect an emotion you experienced while reading a text, provide an answer to the Big Question, provide commentary on a text’s events, develop a similar character, or tell another, similar story. This is a CREATIVE assignment, so your paper might take you in a totally different direction. (Don’t start freaking out yet! I swear you’ll end up loving this project because of the work you will do!)

YOUR PAPER WILL START WITH AN INTRODUCTION

WHAT SHOULD BE IN MY INTRODUCTION OR DEAR READER?

Your introduction is meant to greet readers and give a bit of background information about your project. You’ll need to introduce the subject and anything you think the reader should know about you and/or your project before they read it. It will help familiarize your readers quickly with your ideas and supply information that will help build meaning the further they read. It establishes the theme or BIG QUESTION, the tone, and the paper’s subject matter. It should be reader friendly, informative, and engaging. (You want your readers to continue reading your paper after they read the introduction!) It should be at least 2 paragraphs long or as long as it takes to help your reader understand what they are about to read.

What kind of information might I include in the introduction?

*How you came up with your BIG QUESTION

- *Why you are interested in your BIG QUESTION
- *Why others might be interested in your BIG QUESTION
- *Why your BIG QUESTION is important to society
- *Mention the different texts that made you analyze or think about this BIG QUESTION (You must reference at least 2 texts we have read in class and one outside text)
- *Different characters that might have helped you consider this BIG QUESTION
- *Different settings that might have helped you consider this BIG QUESTION
- *An overview of the territory to come

YOU DO NOT NEED TO ADDRESS ALL OF THESE TOPICS IN YOUR INTRODUCTION, JUST THE ONES YOU FEEL ARE IMPORTANT TO YOUR PARTICULAR PROJECT

DIRECTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. Pick a BIG QUESTION that interests you. You'll be creating your paper around this. You want an engaging topic so you and your reader stay interested. **YOU MUST INCLUDE 8 GENRES TOTAL**
2. You may use any genres you want, but you **CAN NOT REPEAT A GENRE**. (A list of genres is below)
3. You must include some type of required research with your BIG QUESTION that will involve interviews or a survey of some kind. This is because these BIG QUESTIONS should be discussed by society. This is a great opportunity to talk to your parents, grandparents, neighbors, teachers, and peers. Remember, you want a BIG QUESTION that makes people think, discuss, and possibly debate. One of your genres must comment on this research in some way.
4. At least two of the texts we have analyzed in class must address this BIG QUESTION. **THEREFORE, AT LEAST TWO OF YOUR GENRES MUST ADDRESS THESE TEXTS (ONE FOR EACH TEXT)**. The reader will know that those texts were addressed because at the bottom of your genre, you will put the title of the text.
5. Other genres may (but do not have to) reference different texts such as other novels, poems, TV shows, movies, etc.
6. At least half of your genres must contain at least 2-3 paragraphs worth of writing. This ensures that you are analyzing your BIG QUESTION in other ways than just showing your drawing capabilities.
7. Some writing should be in every genre.
8. Your introduction does not count as a genre.
9. You must include a cover and Table of Contents
10. A theme should be the central focus of your paper. The paper must flow from one genre to the next.

11. *If you use other sources, you must include a bibliography and cite your sources. This ensures that you are not plagiarizing work. If you use any sources, but do not cite them and include a bibliography, it is considered plagiarism and will result in an automatic zero. For example, if you use ideas from a website (not even a direct quote) you must cite that source. If you do not, your grade will be a zero, even if it's just one sentence in your whole project.

THE REST OF THE PIECES

You can set up your pieces in any way you choose, but you need to select your pieces on the basis of how it moves from one piece to the next, communicating an idea or a story to your reader. Pieces should connect in ways that the reader can understand. You should have a sense of unity in the whole project. You will more than likely need to create more pieces than the required eight to make your paper high in quality. REMEMBER THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE OF ANY READABLE PAPER IS THE MEANING MAKING THAT COMES FROM A SINGLE FOCUS. FOCUS IS EVERYTHING.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF GENRES YOU COULD INCLUDE IN YOUR PAPER

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|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Dialogue | 14. Letter | 25. Ballad |
| 2. Journal entries | 15. Post card | 26. Ode |
| 3. Movie script | 16. Wanted poster | 27. Song |
| 4. Collage | 17. Dream | 28. Character sketch |
| 5. Cartoon | 18. First person narrative | 29. Brochure |
| 6. Recipe (doesn't have to deal with food) | 19. Third person narrative | 30. Bumper sticker |
| 7. Eyewitness account | 20. Interior monolog | 31. Game rules |
| 8. Newspaper article | 21. Poems for two voices | 32. Interview |
| 9. Feature news story | 22. Free verse | 33. Job application |
| 10. Dear Abby | 23. Love poem | 34. Web site home page |
| 11. Comic strip | 24. I Am The One Who Poem | 35. Facebook page |
| 12. Obituaries | | 36. Email |
| 13. Classified Ads | | 37. Map with explanation |
| | | 38. Parody |
| | | 39. Prayer |
| | | 40. Time lines |

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|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 41. Want ad | 57. Pop up book | 70. Cereal box |
| 42. Greeting card | 58. | 71. Product jingles |
| 43. Schedule/t hings to do | 59. Weddi ng, | 72. Advertise ment |
| 44. Top ten list | graduation, or | 73. Humorous essay |
| 45. Critique of a text/source | special events invitation | 74. Billboard |
| 46. Speech or debate | 60. Board game rules | 75. Recomme ndation letter |
| 47. Short story | 61. Power point (printed out) | 76. Rejection letter |
| 48. Ghost story | 62. Tabloi d | 77. Commerci al script |
| 49. Myth, fairy tale, fable | 63. CD liner notes | 78. Scene for a TV show |
| 50. Talk show interview | 64. Fashio n magazine article | 79. Love letter |
| 51. Comedy routine | 65. Quiz/te st | 80. Self- portrait |
| 52. Picture book | 66. Ranso m note | 81. Memory |
| 53. Chart or diagram with explanation and analysis | 67. Thank you note | 82. Sermon |
| 54. Restaurant description | 68. Book jacket | 83. Eulogy |
| 55. Menu | 69. Lab analysis | 84. Survey results analysis |
| 56. How-to or directions booklet | | 85. Ghost story |
| | | 86. Product evaluation |

Always remember that Ms. Brang loves you and would NEVER give you something that she felt you could not do. Yes, this is a time-consuming project and will require hard work and dedication. This is why we will work on some of it in class, and you will be given ample time to complete it. Yes, this project requires creativity, and Ms. Brang knows that you are all creative people and will create wonderful projects. She is very much looking forward to see your thought process in the next couple weeks, your work throughout the project, and the final prodcuts. Her expectations are very high. Yes, this was difficult to write in 3rd person for Ms. Brang. GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN!

“Whenever someone asks me to define love, I usually think for a minute, then I spin around and pin the guy’s arm behind his back. NOW who’s asking the questions?” ~Jack Handy, Saturday Night Live

RUBRIC- HOW WILL I ASSESS YOUR PROJECT?

Introduction	87. Above and Beyond	88. Satisfactory/ 89.	90. Below Average 91. Did not fulfill requirements and has little insight
92. Explains the Big Question, engages readers, and describes where the paper is going	93. You just blew my mind! Creative/original thought	94.	95.
96. Structure 97. Has cover page, title page, and follows directions	98.	99.	100.
101. BIG QUESTION 102. The project is focused on a BIG QUESTION. This question was well thought out and analyzed.	103.	104.	105.
106. 8 different genres 107. Genres are creative and relate to the topic. At least 2 are related to texts we read in class, one is related to an outside text, and at least one addresses the interviews or surveys you completed. Half of the genres must contain at least 2 paragraphs worth of writing	108.	109.	110.
111. Unity, cohesion 112. The pieces flow together, yet can stand on their own	113.	114.	115.
116. Strong Writing 117. Variety of Sentences, strong words, followed mechanic rules	118.	119.	120.

121. Endnotes

ⁱMary-Anne Neal, "Engaging Students Through Effective Questions," *Education Canada*, 51, no. 1 (2011): 49-52, <http://www.cea->

ⁱⁱRebekah Peeples Massengill, "Sociological Writing as Higher-Level Thinking: Assignments that Cultivate that Sociological Imagination," *Teaching Sociology*, 39, no. 4 (2011): 371-381, <http://dx.doi.org.librarylink.uncc.edu/10.1177/0092055X11407350> (accessed November 14, 2011).

ⁱⁱⁱIbid

^{iv}Kathry Carr, "How Can We Teach Critical Thinking," *ERIC Digest*, 1 (1990), <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=> (accessed November 14, 2011).

^vTom Romano, *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*, (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2000), 5

^{vi}Kathry Carr, "How Can We Teach Critical Thinking," *ERIC Digest*, 1 (1990), <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=> (accessed November 14, 2011).

^{vii}Tom Romano, *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*, (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2000), 33-34

^{viii}Kathry Carr, "How Can We Teach Critical Thinking," *ERIC Digest*, 1 (1990), <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=> (accessed November 14, 2011).

^{ix}Tom Romano, *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*, (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2000), 56

^xIbid, 57

^{xi}Ibid, 56

^{xii}Ibid, 91

^{xiii}Rebekah Peeples Massengill, "Sociological Writing as Higher-Level Thinking: Assignments that Cultivate that Sociological Imagination," *Teaching Sociology*, 39, no. 4 (2011): 371-381, <http://dx.doi.org.librarylink.uncc.edu/10.1177/0092055X11407350> (accessed November 14, 2011).

Annotated Bibliography

Carr, Kathryn. "How Can We Teach Critical Thinking?" *ERIC Digest* 1 (1990).

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED326304>
(accessed November 14, 2011).

This article gives ideas for how to incorporate critical thinking into the classroom.

Massengill, Rebekah Peeples. "Sociological Writing as Higher-Level Thinking: Assignments that Cultivate the Sociological Imagination." *Teaching Sociology* 39, no. 4 (2011): 371-381.

<http://dx.doi.org.librarylink.uncc.edu/10.1177/0092055X11407350> (accessed November 14, 2011).

This article gives information about why we need to teach our students critical thinking and how to do so with writing.

McCarty, Marietta. *Little big minds: sharing philosophy with kids*. New York: Penguin Group, 2006.

This book is very helpful for students to answer Big Questions. It provides tons of ideas for journal prompts to get students critically thinking about many different topics.

"Multi-Genre Research Paper - Mahara." Home - Mahara.

<http://eport.education.illinois.edu/view/view.php?id=134> (accessed November 14, 2011).

Provides a great explanation and gives examples of multigenre papers.

"Multigenre Projects." Welcome to Writing@CSU.

<http://writing.colostate.edu/gallery/multigenre/index.htm> (accessed November 14, 2011).

This is a very helpful website that explains what multigenre papers are, gives a list of genres, and gives examples.

"Multigenre Writing." www.users.muohio.edu. <http://www.users.muohio.edu/romanots/>
(accessed November 14, 2011).

This website gives strong examples of multigenre projects, rubrics, and handouts.

Neal, Mary-Anne. "Engaging Students Through Effective Questions." *Education Canada* 51, no.

1 (2011): 49-52. <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/engaging-students-through-effective-questions>. (accessed November 14, 2011).

This article gives information about how to incorporate critical thinking into the questions we ask our students.

Powell, Padgett. *The interrogative mood*. London: Profile, 2010.

This book is made up entirely of questions. It is thought-provoking and can be extremely frustrating to read because of all the questions. If I had more time, I would have liked to include excerpts from this text throughout the year so students could think about the questions.

Romano, Tom. *Blending genre, altering style: writing multigenre papers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2000.

This book is amazing if you are going to incorporate multigenre papers into your classroom. It gives several useful ideas for lessons as well.

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