



***Sneaking in Some Creativity:
Finding Students' Writing Voices in a High Stakes Testing Environment***

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English I-IV

Keywords:

Research, engagement, vocabulary, writing process

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis:

Through researching engaging topics, students will use the writing process to not only come up with strong purpose and to back up their ideas with meaningful, well worded support, but to find their writing voices and beat the “block”.

I hope to teach this unit during the coming year to 80 students in my three English II classes, which are two Foundation Inclusion classes and one MYIB class.

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Dalyce Firby

Introduction

East Mecklenburg High School is located in East Charlotte and is part of the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District. East is a Title 1 school where over 60% of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch options. It opened its doors in 1950 where it was originally the only high school for the entire East part of the county. In its 65 years of excellence, East has only had 7 principals, including the current patriarch of the school, Rick Parker.ⁱ The school has offered a rigorous International Baccalaureate Program since 1998 which includes the middle years option (8-9) and the diploma program for grades 11-12. In 2011 East Meck launched its Academy of Engineering which encourages studies in STEM fields. On top of all of this, East also offers 21 Advanced Placement classes to students to prepare them for college. East was awarded a U.S. News Best High Schools Bronze ranking, a high honor for a school with such diverse needs and students.ⁱⁱ

The school serves over 1800 students and the average class size is around 28 students. With its location alongside a major thoroughfare in Charlotte and rather central to the center it is a good representative of the city in general, and is often the host of CMS related activities. According to U.S. News High School Reports, the population at East is about 47% Black, 22% White, 19% Hispanic, 8% Asian and the rest comprising of two or more races. These numbers have been fluctuating over the years as the area that East serves becomes more and more gentrified. In addition to this, with the introduction of stronger academic programs such as IB and the Academy of Engineering, the student population fluctuates according to the community's needs. East Meck prides itself on its diverse student body and makes an effort to seek teachers to encourage a global mindset. There are over 40 countries represented in the school in addition to staff from a variety of backgrounds, myself included.

I am an immigrant from Canada and grew up in the middle of British Columbia. I come from a small town of 12,000 people hours away from any cities. As such my personal experiences are based around a generally monocultural school- the dominant cultures were native and white, with little to nothing else. Behavior and discipline were not major issues for rural teachers, as I experienced in my own school as well as practicum, as most teachers knew parents personally and the community took a special interest in education. My entire high school, one of only two in town, had 850 students spanning across grades 8-12. Class sizes were anywhere from 7 (English Literature) to a maximum of 25 (English). There were people of all incomes represented, and as a child

of a single parent I was among the lowest incomes in my area. Still we managed to be adequately fed and clothed, with a roof over our heads, and our school did not have anything like a reduced lunch program. Due to the small school and class sizes students formed strong relationships with each other and the faculty. While I was ready to get out of high school, and the tiny town in general, I still look back fondly on my education in such a setting.

Teaching in CMS has definitely been a change of pace from where I come from. I am an English teacher with a certification in ESL and English Language Arts. I am a licensed teacher in North Carolina and in British Columbia, Canada, and I have lived in the U.S. for about a year and a half. I am in my second year of teaching at East Meck and I can notice myself adapting to the needs of my students and the school. The class sizes range anywhere from 17 to 35 students and the school seems very large to me at over 1800 spanning only four grades. While I know that Charlotte is by no means a giant city by American standards, it still seems huge compared to my roots. The diverse population creates a wealth of issues in education, but also offers an assortment of rich experiences and personalities to work with. With so many students coming from a socially disadvantaged situation, the likes of which I had never experienced before, some things have truly been a challenge. I had never been confronted with parents refusing to take phone calls, children so hungry they cannot think, students living in their parent's cars, and on and on. I have learned so much more from doing the work and having to be resourceful than from being in university Education classes and just talking about it, and I am sure I will continue to adapt.

Concordantly, when I heard about the Charlotte Teachers Institute (CTI) I was interested in the prospect of increasing my abilities as a teacher through working with others. The added course credits and monetary gain don't hurt either. But in all honesty the conversations had during our sessions and the process of designing a unit plan have helped push me further in my career. Listening to the struggles and successes of my peers caused me to reflect upon my own practice, and I hope to be more adaptive because of it.

At East Meck last year I was teaching English I and English III, so when I began the CTI program last spring, that was what I expected to be teaching again. As such, I began to plan for a research unit that would be part of the curriculum for English I. During the summer I was informed that my position had been changed and that I would now be on the English II PLC (Professional Learning Communities) which means I will exclusively be teaching English to grade 10 students. East Meck, like most high schools across the U.S., cares very much about the scores from the English II EOC (End of Course) test as they are part of the data that ranks schools. As such, this new position is very demanding as the school has so much on the line. I know that I should be honored that I have been trusted with such a role, but I am also intimidated by the pressure for my students to perform well. In Canada we have eliminated most standardized testing and I can often feel like a fish out of water when it comes to this topic.

As such, I am drawing my curriculum unit from my personal belief that students need to learn about more than just taking a test. I believe that they need to gain the skills to be successful at their future careers, as most jobs do not require weekly exams. While we have to of course master all of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) I want my students to also strengthen their research skills.ⁱⁱⁱ Using high interest topics and the writing process, I want to encourage my students to be passionate about a cause and to argue their perspectives. They should think about not only making a statement, but knowing why they are in the right, or at the very least to see all sides of the issue.

I vary my types of activities as I expect my students to engage in many methods of learning, including using technological resources, interactions with their peers, project based learning and independent study. Students read and write every day and are encouraged to seek texts that they enjoy. While my students are arranged in rows, they are encouraged to work together on many projects as I believe they gain more from the experience through teamwork. They will assess each other's work and in so doing think about their own. My students are very varied in as far as their reading levels and I differentiate my lessons according to their needs as much as I can. I push for high interest texts and topics in a hope that I can grab their attention in this quickly evolving world of technology. I hope to foster a love of learning in my classroom as it is the key to growth no matter the situation students may find themselves in.

Rationale

The goal of this unit is to strengthen the research skills of my students. In my own experience I remember being a very weak writer and researcher early in school. I grew up in a very small town in northern Canada and we had just gotten dial up internet when I was in grade 9 let alone any research resources of any use. Our library had very limited books and the encyclopedias just didn't go far enough into the subjects at hand. I wasn't given very many opportunities and it made it very difficult for me to adapt when I went to university. I made mistakes on formatting and MLA style. I even came close to being kicked out of school when I improperly cited a paper in History class with MLA rather than Chicago. I didn't intentionally mess up, I was just never told how to do it. My university had high speed internet, access to a multitude of databases and an enormous wealth of books. I flourished in university when I had patient and strong teachers in my early classes, which is what I want for my students.

Many of my students are very weak when it comes to writing and through drafting students will strengthen their skills. Through peer editing and discussion students will learn from each other's work and process. By using topics that students choose themselves, I hope to give them some autonomy in their learning. Through learning the process students will understand how they may work independently on their writing in the future. Like any activity, my students' writing skills will improve as they practice

more. I am providing topics that will interest students as they “learn more and better when they are actively engaged in processes of inquiry that stimulate their imagination and their interest”.^{iv} We are in a new age of information technology and it is important that students become adept at managing the wealth of information that they have at their fingertips. They need these skills as the “sooner students develop competencies in information technology, the better equipped they will be to survive the onrush of data that awaits them”.^v

Background Information

I teach three 90 minute classes a day. They are all grade 10 English classes, also called English II or World Literature. I tend to teach the same concepts throughout the day and differentiate the materials based on the class needs. My first class starts at 7:25 am and the last class ends at 2:15 pm. My students tend to work more productively in the morning, and my last class tends to be full of energy and ready to leave.

I have an International Baccalaureate (IB) class in the first block of the morning that is made up of 34 students who are mostly in IB for all of their classes. They generally intend on entering the grade 11 IB Diploma program. They are mostly at a level 3-5 reading level (out of five) with five being the highest. I often seek texts that have higher lexicon values in order to challenge them. In addition I intentionally use stronger academic language on a regular basis with these students as a way of modelling expected behavior. Academic language can often seem like a completely new language for students so it is important that students understand new vocabulary through use.^{vi} For these students I assign a lot of work as their semester is only half of the school year and there is a lot of ground to cover. The IB program demands rigorous challenges for students as it builds their abilities and self-discipline. Discipline and behavior issues are almost a non-existent challenge for this class- they are highly motivated both by the expectations of themselves and from the adults around them, and often their parents are very involved in their education. Instead challenges with this class are finding the time to genuinely grade all of the work they do and finding the right balance of challenging them without overdoing it. These students tend to have always been high achievers and can be very sensitive to failures. They often get an inflated sense of their abilities and can be hit hard when I critique their work in order to move them forward. The system demands growth from students, but that can be difficult when many of them are already at the maximum score that they are being tested for. It is a challenge to push them to the next level when they are already achieving most of what the school system expects of them in English II, yet I do not want them to be wasting their time in my class as everyone can grow. They thrive on diverse activities, and are open to whatever ideas teachers throw at them, as long as they see the point of it and are learning. They do not appreciate wasting time on things that they do not deem purposeful. IB students are driven and highly motivated, which makes them both a joy and a lot of work to teach.

I have two Foundation English II classes that are inclusion. This means that there are many EC (Exceptional Children) students in the class that require extra help and attention. As such I have smaller class sizes than most teachers and an assistant teacher in the room with me. It is critical in this class that they receive constant monitoring and feedback as they can really struggle with the materials. A lot of my time in class is spent reviewing topics individually with students and dealing with behavior issues that arise. Many of these students do not see the merits of education, especially English, and are not highly motivated to succeed in class. Many of these students come from unstable backgrounds and live more for today than for the future. They need to be reminded often about why they are in school and what their purpose is in class. Assignments have to be laid out in very explicit steps and they need a lot of assistance in every part of the process. Their minds can easily be distracted, as any teenager- especially a disadvantaged one, for there are many things out of their control in life and stress for them to deal with. In addition to this there are many learning disabilities among my students, both diagnosed and undiagnosed. Indeed these classes are faced with a multitude of challenges in the way of their high school success. Fortunately these students have English yearlong giving them the time they need to go over the materials and really solidify the concepts. Most of these students have a very low reading level, between 1 and 3: most falling in the 1 category. As such they really struggle with reading most of the prescribed texts of English II with most of their reading levels hovering around grade 5. Chunking, annotating and vocabulary practice is critical for these students and we have to spend a lot of time repeating concepts. I specifically choose texts between their level and that of the EOC test in the hopes that through gradual practice and challenge I will have them at the right level by the end of the year. Because of the ground we have to cover in class, there is very little “extra” time to do creative activities.

I generally avoid giving homework as most of what we have to do in class revolves around computers. Most of the students in my classes do not have reliable technology or internet at home and I have found it almost impossible for them to get work done before class. In addition, many of my students struggle to work independently, especially my Foundations classes, without consistent help and reassurances. Again, because I work with many socially disadvantaged students, working on school work at home while their life is tumultuous is not a priority for many. It is very fortunate that I have many students yearlong in order to find success with them and their English studies.

Strategies

- I will plan with the end in mind. As Doug Lemov reiterates in his book *Teach Like a Champion*, it is integral to not plan what activities we will be doing but to plan objectives first, as the “only criterion that determines the success of an activity is not whether you do it and people seem to want to do it, but whether you achieved an objective that can be assessed”.^{vii}

- I use Google Classroom as my main learning management system (LMS). It allows me to post questions, quizzes, tests, information and exit tickets for students and parents to use. There are a variety of apps that allow me to quickly grade, review and share with students. I am able to save a lot of paper which the school strictly budgets. Students that have missed a day of class can simply check the Classroom for missing work.
- The writing process is the system of first brainstorming ideas, then writing a series of drafts until a polished addition is ready to share or submit for assessment. The writing process will help students understand the how to improve upon their writing instead of simply handing in the first thing they come up with. Drafting and editing gives students the chance to improve their writing.
- Since the end of course test is online it is important that students become adept at reading texts online, learn to type faster, draw digital connections and to feel comfortable in a technological setting. We do as much as 70% of our activities online.
- We will review research skills with an interactive scavenger hunt I have designed with Google Forms. It allows students to research at their own pace using appropriate websites, in addition to allowing me check digitally if they are on the right track.
- There are some topics we have reviewed before, most importantly the appeals of Ethos, Pathos and Logos, so we will do a review of rhetorical devices and students are encouraged to think critically of persuasion within their writing. There is also the hope that students notice the way advertisers manipulate their audience.
- We are going to use outside resources in the form of the media specialist and the media center. Through using the center and all that it contains we are providing students with information outside of the normal classroom setting, further preparing them for the diverse environments of university and life after high school.
- Through the written warm-ups I can activate prior learning as well as review activities from the previous days.
- There is an emphasis on moving past lower order thinking skills (memorize and understand) and getting students to practice and use high order thinking skills on a regular basis (evaluate/ analyze) through questioning and expectations.
- We will review citations, summaries, quotation and annotations to ensure students are ready and capable to include their sources.
- Students will use peer editing as a way to think about their own work, check for mistakes that they may have missed, and to have pride in their work.
- Many of our work is centered around computers so students are building their typing skills, strengthening their abilities with programs such as word and docs, and interacting with the internet with a critical lens.
- Through the use of exit tickets I can evaluate how much students retained from the lesson and future goals for our class. It also encourages students to reflect on

how the lesson went and what they got out of it. There is a question about mood as well with ensures students are being aware of the other factors that may affect their learning.

Assessments

Students will be evaluated on a daily basis through informal observations. Vocabulary absorption will be evaluated through their completion of vocabulary quizzes at the end of the week. These will be in the form of paper or online. Students will be assessed on their ability to define a word in one of five ways, via a definition, an antonym, a synonym, an image or if it used in a sentence correctly. There will be a rubric provided to students at the beginning of the project to establish expectations for students. In addition, there will be a peer editing worksheet that will push students to assess each other's work. Students often contact me directly through email when they are struggling as well.

Worksheets that students complete will be compiled in their binders which are handed in every 3-4 weeks. Through these occasional binder checks I can ensure that students are completing their work even though I am not always assigning a grade. It allows me to keep track of their effort and staggers the paperwork I have to get through on a regular basis.

As for exit tickets, one to three questions allows a teacher to gather daily data that checks for understanding and allows for the refinement of the next day's lesson. Not only do exit tickets check for the students' understanding of the material, but it is a way to assess the effectiveness of instructional methods, especially since effectiveness can vary greatly from year to year and class to class.^{viii} Such a small activity can garner a lot of information.

Reflection

At the end of every class there will be a few minutes for the class to review what they did that day. This will remind students of the purpose of our lessons and enforce meaning. In addition it sums up our day and gives closing on a daily basis. This reflection is important to giving purpose to our classes, which many students need in order to buy in. Through a positive closing on what we did that day students leave hopefully looking forward to the next class. On a personal level, I always take 10-15 minutes at the end of the day to quietly think about the things that went well and the things that didn't. I too need to learn from the day in order to succeed the next.

Objectives

Students will be given a long list of choices for what they can research. They are to choose something they are passionate about in order for high interest. In addition with the

kind of knowledge they gain from the research they can hopefully find a long term interesting in learning more. For example, I have communicated with the Engineering program at the school for some topics, such as bridge construction or city infrastructure, for those students that want to follow in that career in the future. Through choice students are given some autonomy over their education. Many students are involved in a variety of extracurriculars and can find something that overlaps with their other hobbies.

As a teacher the CCSS standards are very clear about research skills being integral to a balanced student. The writing standards are very explicit (standards 10.7-10.9) that they need to write for both short and long periods of time on research topics, gather relevant information and draw evidence from texts to back up their ideas.^{ix} On a personal level students need to be able to articulate themselves in a variety of settings.

It is important that students learn how to avoid plagiarism. Technology today makes it incredibly easy for students to find information, as in a “cut-and-paste world, examples of both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are everywhere”.^x These technological skills will be integral to almost every job of the future, and even if they don’t, students will likely be involved with technology in their personal lives. By extension, they need to be adept at using technology whether they end up using it or not.

There is too often an emphasis on the product rather than the process when it comes to writing. Students and teachers study a combination of two things, literature and writing, and often the two get confused. Of course the work that students are handing in is not canon literature, as it has not been developed and refined to last the ages. From the beginning they are often set up for disappointment in the understanding that what they write is not the same as what they read. As teachers we become frustrated with this same concept in addition to the desire to motivate students to try anyway. Instead we need for students to understand that writing is a process rather than a product and that the joy of it, the purpose and even the grade should be based on the steps rather than the end.^{xi}

Vocabulary

By having weekly vocabulary lists and quizzes I hope to broaden student’s understanding of the work we are doing. Each week students will be provided with a worksheet and list of words provided on the board. Students complete worksheets such as this example.

Example:

1) Word:	Definition:
Synonym:	Antonym:

Picture:	Word used in a sentence:
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Through examining a word five different ways the meaning is truly cemented in their minds. According to Jeff Zwiers in *Building Academic Language*, having students come up with their own ideas “encourages them to make their own connections- a skill they will need to use more and more in school and life”.^{xii} In addition we use the vocabulary extensively throughout the week. On a weekly basis students will fill out the same vocabulary sheet with different words provided. This is a predictable procedure that happens on a weekly basis and allows students to not be caught unaware of what is expected of them.

Instructional Days

Day One: Vocabulary and Introducing Research

Activity one- Introduction

As students walk in they will retrieve their Chromebooks as they always do and open up their journal documents. On the board, and within the daily writes document on the Google Classroom, there will be a prompt for them to write about. A timer will be set on the board. I generally give students 10 minutes but if the topic is a little more difficult I will give 15-20. Today’s topic will be “**Why do we need to learn about the writing process?**”. After the timer has gone off we will spend five minutes discussing their reasons. The teacher should highlight some of the major reasons if students miss the point. Through this daily writing and discussion students get into the spirit of the writing class on a daily basis.

Activity two- Vocabulary

Students will be handed a chart, which can be accessed in the appendix, which has ten slots for vocabulary. Vocabulary pertinent to the unit will be given on the board and will also be listed in the Google Classroom, Today’s vocabulary will be: reliability, categorizing, citation, commentary, drafting, paraphrase, plagiarism, quotation, summary and thesis. The timer will be on the board for 25 minutes and students will be able to use dictionary.com or physical dictionaries. This sheet will go into their binders for their binder checks. They will have a vocabulary quiz every Friday based on these words. The quiz will ask questions such as find the antonym or synonym, identify the word from a set of pictures, choose the correct definition or use context to decide the meaning of the word.

Activity three- Digital Scavenger Hunt

I have designed a scavenger hunt on Google Forms that students can access from the link provided on the Google Classroom. Through a series of websites and questions tied to these sites students are immersed in the internet and required to find information independently using quality sites and strong prompts. The intention is that students think about how to look for bias within the sites, seek information without reading everything involved and quickly give credit where credit is due. Teachers can review student work after they have submitted the form. There are 18 questions and this activity should take students around 35-40 minutes. Discussion around what students gained will follow the activity and will ensure that students are aware of their purpose.

Activity four- Exit Ticket: Students will fill out a simple three question exit ticket either on paper or digitally. The main questions will be: 1) Why would we bother learning about research? 2) What strategies did you struggle or succeed at? 3) On a scale of 1-5, five being the highest, where are you today in terms of happiness, satisfaction and mood?

Day Two: Brainstorming and Choosing Topics

Activity one- Introduction

For today's Daily Write students will answer the question on the board: **“What would you choose to do, if it could be anything, for the rest of your life? Why? What would the benefits be? The problems?”**. Hopefully this will push them to think critically about what they are passionate about and will lead into their topic choices. Through choosing a topic that they are interested in students should have a stronger engagement with the project. This should take ten minutes. Afterwards they will be given five minutes to discuss with a partner. Then I will ask partners to explain what their teammate chose and why they chose it. This will emphasize listening skills as well as take some of the pressure off when sharing their goals.

Activity two- Establishing Expectations

I will hand out the expectations for the class. These can be found in the appendix. This includes the eventual rubric they will be graded on, the checklist that they must include that establishes their process, and expectations of their paper. The Foundations class has a different rubric from the IB students, who have a rubric created by the IB program. The teacher should go over these individually with the class and address any questions that may come up. This should take 15 minutes.

Activity three- Brainstorming

Students will be given a chart of topics that they can choose from for their project. There will be 36 options, one for every student- eventually. The first task they should do it to

choose three that they are really interested in. They should then create a brainstorming tree for each one. The graphic organizer for this can be found in the appendix. They may look up topics online while they choose if that helps them. They may also come up with their own ideas but those must be approved by the teacher. This process should take 30 minutes.^{xiii} This brainstorming activity will be included in the eventual project they hand in.

Activity four- Sign up and Pre-Research

There will be a paper version of the topics provided. Students will be able to choose which topic they would like by writing their name in the box. No topic may be chosen twice. This should take about ten minutes. Then students will be asked to fill in the topic proposal chart. This can be found in the appendix.^{xiv} This topic proposal chart will be due the next day and needs to be signed off by the teacher. Students may use the rest of class to complete this. If they do not finish it then it will be homework. They may have it done early and signed, if they can.

Day Three: Reviewing and Using Research Techniques

Activity one- Introduction

For today's Daily Write students will look at the image on the board. I generally choose a photo from the daily newspaper but the source can be anything- there just needs to be multiple evidences present. They will ask and answer the lower order thinking skills of the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) and how and write them in their document. There will be ten minutes provided for this using the timer. Afterwards we will discuss as a class what they found. ***CREATIVE WRITING OPTION*** If you are feeling like it will go well, it is always fun to give another 5-10 minutes and ask students to write the story around the picture. They can be as creative as they wish. Again, they can share their stories with the class afterwards. While students are writing they should have their topic proposal sheets out and the teacher should be going around signing their sheets.

Activity two- Media Center Introduction

We will pack up our things and head over to the media center. There the media specialist has a lesson that overviews the resources available. She shows them how to use the catalogue, the citation generator and the search engines available. This takes about 30 minutes.

Activity three- Research begins

Students will be instructed by the teacher how to take proper notes and citations. They will be provided with reference sheets and notecards on which they will put their work.

This should take 10 minutes and should be a quick review from what they learned in grade 9. Then they will be given the rest of class to use the internet, the books and the other resources at their disposal. They are expected to find at least 4 sources for Foundations and 6 sources for IB. They will have some time the next day to work as well. These notecards will be due at the end of class on the next day.

**Since I am assuming this is a Wednesday, classes are all ten minutes shorter to accommodate homeroom. Fortunately the timing on this day is flexible.

Day Four: Using Research and Practicing Citations

Activity one: Introduction

The writing prompt today will be for students to summarize what they have learned about their topic so far. They should have 8-10 sentences written by the end of 15 minutes. Then they will be given ten minutes to share with a partner what they have done so far. Their partner should critique and help them. They are then asked to spend another five minutes and write 4-6 sentences on what their partner is doing, and critique by what they would do differently.

Activity two: Review Vocabulary

Take five minutes and talk about the vocabulary terms that were given on Monday. Ensure students are all on the same page as far as definitions are concerned. Take another five minutes and ask students to highlight the words of the week that they find within their handouts so far this unit. Remind them that they will have a vocabulary quiz the next day. This way students will all be on the same page when it comes to definitions and there will be no unexpected surprises when it comes to the quiz. In addition, students often generate a variety of synonyms and antonyms with further increases the vocabulary of the class in general.

Activity three: Research

Have students pack up and return to the library. They may take the rest of class to continue researching. They should hand in their notecards at the end of class. Have students take a quick exit ticket question posted on the Google Classroom, which they can do with their phones or the media center's computers. The questions for today will be: 1) What part of your topic are you struggling with? 2) What part of the writing process are you most worried about? (This could be a checklist), 3) Are you ready for the vocab quiz tomorrow? And 4) On a scale of 1-5, five being the highest, where are you today in terms of happiness, satisfaction and mood?

Day Five: Vocabulary Assessment and Thesis Writing

Activity one: Introduction

Today's Daily Write prompt will be for them to read a paragraph provided on the board and identify some key elements. The passage does not matter- it can be work from one of the students or even from a story they have read. They need to identify the topic sentence, the thesis, strong vocabulary present and their reaction to it. They should also write at least two lines critiquing the passage. This should take 15 minutes and be between 6-8 lines long. Discuss with students afterwards.

Activity two: Vocabulary Quiz

I create weekly quizzes using Google Forms and post them on Friday mornings to the Google Classroom. Students needs to close their books and complete the quiz. They need to be closely monitored so they do not look up the words. If they are caught it is an instant 0. Students will have their scores immediately. This generally takes 15 minutes.

Activity three: Thesis Writing

Discuss what a thesis is and ensure it is written on the board. Students should know but make sure they are all aware. Then handout the thesis practice page provided.^{xv} This will be one the sheets they will submit with their research project. Go over the first example as a class, and have them complete the others independently. There is second sheet of prompts that students should complete on a separate piece of paper a document.^{xvi} This should take 40 minutes. While they are working on this the teacher should redistribute the notecards handed in the previous day.

Activity four: Reflection

Have students take a quick exit ticket question posted on the Google Classroom, 1) Where are you at with your project- Have you completed all the steps? 2) On a scale of 1-5, five being the highest, how was this week in terms of happiness, satisfaction and mood? 3) Is there anything you need me to know (confidentially)?

Day 6: Planning to Write

Activity one: Introduction

Today's Daily Write prompt will be for students to list as many words as they can about their research topic. They should get as creative as they can. They will be given five minutes for this. Then they will meet with a student that they don't normally talk to. They should, without warning, give their best 12 words to the other student and see if they can figure out what their topic is. Then they should explain themselves. The other student is encouraged to critique. This whole process should take 15 minutes. Students should

return to their seats and write a quick 3-5 summary under their words of what they got out of the activity. This should take another five minutes (25 minutes total).

Activity two: Vocabulary

Just like last week they will be given the chart and the words. The words this week are: MLA style, formatting, editing, organize, peer-reviewed, outline, bibliography, introduction, conclusion, and criticism. Just as last week they will be given 25 minutes.

Activity three: Brainstorm/ Outline

Now that students have the research, they need to work on the outline. Their first task is to take a sheet of paper and choose five of the main ideas they have come up with about their topic. They could create word webs around those topics. I encourage pictures and doodles for those students that like visuals. From there they will create an outline such as the one provided in the appendix. The teacher should first explain everything, though that will only take ten minutes, then go around checking in individually. The outline should also include notes or stars of where their research is going to be placed. This should take the rest of class. These outlines will need to be initialed at the beginning of next class and added to the packet of things to be handed in.

Day 7: Writing the First Draft

Activity one: Introduction

Today's Daily Write topic should again be a free write based on a picture. Since they will be writing today I want them to begin loosening up the thinking caps. There will again be a picture on the board and they should give the story behind it. They have ten minutes to free write 6-8 sentences. They should then share with the class. While writing, the teacher should go around and check that outlines were completed.

Activity two: Writing

Students should have their outlines out and ready. The teacher should explain that it is now that they will get started on the writing part. Hand out the writing hooks worksheet to students as a resource.^{xvii} This may be done digitally or written, but it will definitely not be their final product and they should not be afraid of making mistakes. They should also be instructed to not be intimidated by any section in particular and should start on the paragraph they are most confident on. This writing strategy helps fight the "block". I also suggest to students that they write only the thesis statement for their introduction to begin with, and they can come back to writing their introduction when they have completed the rest of the paper. This was they won't be stumped on how to start. The hardest part about the writing part for the teacher is to be hands off and to not interrupt students while they

work on this. Teachers should only be facilitators at this point, helping students when needed and curbing off-task behavior. This should really take most of the period. Encourage students to be quiet, or to listen to music if this helps their thinking.

Activity three: Exit Ticket

For the last few minutes of class students should be filling out another exit ticket. The questions should be: 1) How confident were you when you started writing? 2) What might have made you more confident? 3) What strategy worked best for you? 4) On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you with your work right now?

Day 8: Writing and Integrating Quotes

Activity one: Introduction

The Daily Writing Prompt for today will be around finding strong quotes. I will list three words (four for IB) and students will have to find two quotes per word and cite their sources. This should take almost 20 minutes but will be a good review for citations. Have students check their partner's work.

Activity two: Review Integrating Quotes

Give the reference sheet out to students and review how to paraphrase and integrate quotes.^{xviii} Make sure to really hit home that plagiarism will not be tolerated and they should ask or automatically cite if they are unsure. Give students time in class to review their work and integrate quotes. Remind students that they will be sharing their work with their peers the next class and they must have a draft prepared for the next day. The rest of class should be given for work time.

Activity three: Exit Ticket

For the last few minutes of class students should be filling out another exit ticket. The questions should be: 1) Which are you struggling with for your paper- intro, body, conclusion, integrating quotes, and/or citations? 2) What could you or I do to help with that? 3) Are you prepared to share your paper tomorrow?

Day 9: Peer Editing and Revision

Activity one: Introduction

The Daily Writing Prompt for today will be to review a poorly written blog post. They will be asked to copy and paste it from the Google Classroom and go over it using the comments feature of Google Docs. They should find 8 things wrong with it. Then they

will confer with a partner and find two more things that they didn't notice. This will take 20 minutes.

Activity two: Peer Review 1

Students will be given a handout of a peer review checklist. This can be found in the appendix. They will go through a partner's paper and find errors accordingly. They will have 25 minutes to do so. They should be very thorough. This needs to be signed by the teacher once completed and will be included in the packet.

Activity three: Revision

Students will then take 25 minutes to correct their errors. They must bring their revised draft (draft 2) with them to class the next day.

Activity four: Review the Vocabulary

Check the words of the week with the class. Ensure they all understand the meanings. This should only take five minutes.

Activity five: Exit Ticket

1) Which are three things that went well with your paper? 2) What are three things that you need to work on in your paper? 3) What do you think, according to your rubric, your first draft deserves for a score?

Day 10: Final Day of Work

Activity one: Introduction

For the Daily Write, which will be handed in today and should be ten total, students will write about the steps of the writing process. They should outline 6 steps they went through and what they did at each part. They should explain what went well and what they can work on. This should be a good chunk of writing, around 10 lines and 12 for IB. Discuss as a class. 25 minutes.

Activity two: Vocabulary Quiz

This should take students about 15-20 minutes.

Activity three: Peer Edit 2

Students will be randomly paired with someone and will fill out a checklist based on their paper. They should be closely scrutinizing the other person's work. This should take 15 minutes.

Activity four: Final Polish

Students will be given a final 20 minutes to finish up their papers. The package of everything, their papers and their journals will be due the following day, which will likely be a Monday. I always recommend they get an adult to have a look at their papers before they submit to catch any errors.

Activity five: Final Exit for Unit

1) What was your favorite part of this unit? 2) What will you do in the future? 3) What did you learn? 4) On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you with your work?

Conclusion

I unfortunately ran into issues when I discussed using this unit with my PLC. They do not believe that I have enough time to manage the Common Core State Standards 1-6, the ones that are focused on in testing, if I spend too much time on the research skills. The skills around research are not easily tested, and are thus not the skills that are focused on in the standardized test. While disheartening, I am hoping to push my students enough that they can still learn these research skills that I believe are critical to their futures.

For a short time I thought that I would be able to use this unit as the IB program was going to be using English as the foundational class for their projects. The English department had other ideas though and decided to refuse in order to work on the other standards that need to be addressed.

However I really feel that I was able to work out the kinks on a solid unit plan that I will be able to use in the future when I am allowed more flexibility in my teaching. The activities are of course my style but I feel as if they could be adapted to a variety of settings.

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Appendix 1: Implementing Common Core Standards

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings. Through synonyms and antonyms, in addition to images, students greatly strengthen their vocabulary.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1.a](#)

Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. Students will be looking at not only their side, but what someone may argue.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1.d](#)

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2.b](#)

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2.f](#)

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic). Students will be expected to write a strong conclusion.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4](#)

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. Through drafting students will create a polished work.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5](#)

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. The writing process is founded in this ideal.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8](#)

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10](#)

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Materials Used in Unit

Research Web quest can be found [here](#). Through using the variety of websites and techniques students learn how to sift through all the information on the internet to find what they are looking for. <http://bit.ly/2g7epa7>

Vocabulary worksheet can be found [here](#). By not only defining a word, but also finding similar and opposite meanings, students rapidly expand their vocabulary. For those students that learn visually the images help cement their learning. <http://bit.ly/2gswT9e>

An example of a vocabulary quiz for students can be found [here](#). <http://bit.ly/2fRttJP>

The expectations, rubric and topic ideas can be viewed [here](#). By giving these out early students will have a clear understanding of what they are trying to accomplish. <http://bit.ly/2g8mi2J>

The thesis writing worksheet can be found [here](#). Through scaffolding the process I hope to make thesis writing a simple task. <http://bit.ly/2fdrSwd>

A great peer editing checklist can be found [here](#). Another one can be found [here](#). Through checking each other's work, students reflect on their own work as well as catch mistakes others have made. <http://bit.ly/2fdsLFf> and <http://bit.ly/2gsuH1n>.

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