

Subject: ELA/Writing
Grade Levels: 3-5
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Essential Questions

How does paying more attention to our world change our writing?
How does paying more attention to our world change us as writers?

Lesson 1

Writing about a familiar place, introduction of essential questions

Procedures:

- Invite students to think about a place in school that is familiar to them. Allow a full minute of quiet think time for students to select and think about a place. (Some students may find it helpful to sketch during the thinking time.) Students write about their chosen place. The teacher participates in the activity, writing about the classroom space (or a space within the classroom)—without thinking or focusing on it more than she typically would.
- Provide time for students to share their writing in pairs.
- Introduce and discuss essential questions with students.

Lesson 2, Part 1

Using our senses to “see” our places more fully, connecting sensory (visual) awareness to our writing

Preparation:

- Prepare your (teacher’s) completed (and unrevised) written text from Lesson 1 to project or enlarge for group.

Procedures:

- Introduce lesson. Explain to students that in this lesson we will focus our attention on what we see. Then with these observations in mind we will re-visit our “familiar place” drafts.
- Through class discussion generate and record a list of questions that could be answered by looking (see examples listed below... some questions come from Project Zero’s collection of Thinking Routines. See citations and links at end of unit.)

What colors do you see?

What shapes do you see?
What parts/objects do you see?
What categories of things are in this place?
What quantities do you see?
What do you notice about the size of things?

- Think-aloud as you select several questions you feel are most important for your observation of the classroom space. Note that the selection of questions to consider is variable and different observers/writers may choose different questions.
- Ask students to select questions they think would be important for the places they wrote about and to write these questions down in their notebooks. (They will be using these questions later.)
- Explain to students that with their help you are going to use your selected questions to look closely at the classroom space and that later they will get a chance to visit their own places. Consider each question selected, one at a time. For each, encourage students to silently observe the classroom space with the specific question in mind for at least one minute. (Some students may find it helpful to write notes or sketch during this quiet observation.) Then share and record responses for that question. Repeat this for several questions so that the routine becomes familiar.
- Show students how these observations can inform writing. Begin by reading your projected written text out loud. Think aloud and annotate your draft based on the visual observations. (The draft and edits should be visible to all students.) Encourage student suggestions.
- Debrief--Possible discussion questions:
 - Was looking closely different than the way we generally “see” our classroom? How?
 - When/where else would looking closely at something help us to “see” things more fully?
 - What does this activity make you wonder about?

Lesson 2, Part 2

Continuation of Lesson 2---using our senses to “see” our places more fully, connecting sensory (visual) awareness to our writing

Materials/Preparation

- Students will need their “familiar place” draft from Lesson 1 and the questions they selected in the first part of Lesson 2.
- Enough timers for every pair of students

- Determine what spaces your students have chosen for their “familiar place” draft from Lesson 1—ensure that they will be able to go to these spaces with a partner (unsupervised) or revise plan accordingly. (This lesson assumes that students can independently move around the school building and stop to make and record observations in several places.)

Procedure:

- Review work/ideas from previous lesson.
- Students review the questions they selected during Lesson 2 and highlight three questions to focus on for this activity. With a partner, students visit the place in the school they wrote about in Lesson 1. (Unless the partners happened to have chosen the same place, they will visit two places in the school and go through the looking closely routine twice, once in each place.)

When the students get to their space they follow the same procedures as yesterday:

- They consider each highlighted question one at a time. For each, they focus their attention on the specific question (for example, what objects do I see?) and silently observe their space with the question in mind--for at least one minute (Students should use timers to track time). Following the quiet observation, the students record responses to the question. (It is not necessary for the partner student to record responses if the space is not the one they wrote about, but they could contribute ideas/observations.) When students have recorded observations for all three highlighted questions, the partners go to the other partner’s chosen place and repeat the procedure. After each student in the pair has had a chance to re-visit their place, the students return to the classroom.
- With their partners, students take turns revisiting their written drafts and discussing what changes they would make given their observations. Students annotate their drafts for possible edits/revisions.
- Invite several students to share out their ideas for revision.
- Debrief--Possible discussion question: What went well/ what could have been better?

Lesson 3

Using our senses to “see” our places more fully, connecting sensory (aural) awareness to our writing

Procedures:

- Introduce lesson to students. Previously we focused our attention on what we see with our eyes. Today we are going to switch and focus instead on what we hear. Tell students that you will begin by listening to the sounds in the classroom.
- Ask students to write a few predictions of what sounds they would expect to hear in the classroom.
- Students close their eyes and focus on what they hear for two minutes. They record their observations. Ask students to briefly share what they heard and to report any unexpected observations. Tell students they will again visit their familiar place with their partner, this time--to *listen* and note what they hear.
- Students visit their familiar place with their partner (as they did in Lesson 2, Part 2). They close their eyes, listen for two minutes, and record their observations. They repeat this procedure at the next partner's place and return to the classroom when done.
- When gathered, have students reflect on their sound observations and their annotated "familiar place" drafts. Ask each student to consider one change they might make to their drafts based on their observations.
- Ask for volunteers to share out a change they are considering.
- Debrief
 - How was the listening activity different than/similar to the looking activity?
 - When would listening mindfully be helpful?

Note: For this unit I do not go through all the senses. Depending on the classroom/group context and time available, similar activities could be added for other senses.

Lesson 4

Connecting ourselves to our space

Preparation:

Print out copies of the first set of questions (numbered 1-3 below) for each student.

Prepare group discussion questions to be projected or enlarged so that they are visible to all.

Procedures:

- Introduce lesson...today we will spend some time thinking about how we feel in our chosen "familiar place". Sometimes when we make observations—especially in school—we may not observe or include the effect an object or place has on us—how a place makes us feel.

- Students are up and moving around for the activity with the first question set. Students carry the printed questions and meet up with one partner. Students take turns asking their partner the questions. To ensure that both students get time to talk (and time to listen!), allow a set time for the first person in the pair to ask questions and let the students know you will tell them when it is time to switch roles from listener to speaker. Encourage active listening.

1. What is your connection to your familiar place?
2. What do you do there? Who are you with there?
3. How do you feel when you are in this space?

- After both students in the pairs have had time to share their ideas and listen to their partners, transition back to whole group for the group discussion questions.

Group Discussion Questions:

What is important in your familiar place and how do you know?

Is what is important in your familiar place important to you? Important to your family?

- Read the questions. Explain that different people will have different ideas about the same places and then respond to the questions yourself first. (For example, “*I think reading is important in the classroom. I see more books than anything else...*”) Allow students two minutes of quiet think time to consider these questions for their own places. After the two minutes ask the students to write for two minutes (this could be a simple list) or sketch their thinking about these questions and their place. Have students share their responses with the group.
- Conclude by facilitating a group discussion about how/if the thinking and conversations you just had might make them think differently about their writing. What might they change, or add, or think about differently?
- Debrief--Students write one thing that surprised them, one thing they liked, and one question they have related to the lesson. Collect these reflections.

Lesson 5

Returning to essential questions...

Preparation:

- Write essential questions on white board or on large roll paper. Have markers available.

Procedures

- Use the Chalk-talk protocol from The School Reform Initiative to consider essential questions. <https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/chalk-talk/>

Resources

Naranjo, A. (2018, September 10). Annotation on Smithsonian Learning Lab Resource: Colors / Shapes / Lines: Project Zero Artful Thinking Routine.

<https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/project-zero-thinking-routines/oWYbEjpf19oxcFUp#r/517656>

Naranjo, A. (2018, September 10). Annotation on Smithsonian Learning Lab Resource: Parts, Purposes, Complexities: Project Zero Agency by Design Thinking Routine. Retrieved July 30, 2019.

<https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/project-zero-thinking-routines/oWYbEjpf19oxcFUp>

Chalk-talk Protocol <https://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/microlabs.pdf>