

Lesson Plan A

TITLE

Creative Writing: Letters for change or sharing

TIME

50 minutes

SETTING

The setting for this unit is a standard academic literature class for 10th Grade. The class consists of twenty-four students, ten girls and fourteen boys. This high school is located in a rural town, middle socioeconomic status. There are three students who receive free or reduced lunch. Most students are on track for their grade level reading, however two students read at above average and five students read two years below grade level. Twenty of the students are Caucasian and speak English. Three students are African American and speak in the African American English Vernacular. One student is fluent in Spanish but has limited English proficiency. He has difficulty writing in English but is working on it. One student has an emotional behavior disorder that makes it difficult for him to stay on task and concentrate in class. One student is diagnosed as legally blind, however still has the ability to read large print text. The district is composed of 97.6% white students, 0.6% Black students, 0% Hispanic students, 1% Asian students, and 0.4% Native American students. 7.1% of the school population is low income, the attendance rate is 94% and the high school graduation rate is 91.5%. The average ACT composite score is 21.0. The average size of a high school class is 16.6.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Jim Burke writes that, “writing is exciting because it’s productive and creative; it’s where “the rubber hits the road.” You can’t write and not think...it is a very personal medium...” (152). I think this is a very important concept to maintain in my practice because writing is a great way to allow student to think creatively. It can be easy to limit students with requirements and weight them down with restrictions, so I think it is crucial to allow students the opportunity once in a while to really express themselves and their beliefs. As Weinstein and Novodorski states, “a more appropriate, realistic goal is to stimulate student’s *motivation to learn*, whereby students pursue academic activities because they find them meaningful and worthwhile,” and I strive to incorporate a meaningful activity in this activity by making the instruction directly related to the students’ lives. I call on students to think about their own selves, their stories, and their beliefs and allow them to use these ideas to demonstrate their knowledge. I hope that by writing less formal letters students will focus less on the conventions and more on actually getting involved in the activity and participating with a sense of interest and motivation.

Background information important to this lesson is an understanding of the reading done so far for Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*. Students will have finished the novel and should have a good understanding of the main themes and important aspects of the novel. Some background information is needed for each individual student on a social issue that they feel strongly about. This is not information to be presented in class, but it may be useful to information students before this lesson to think about a social issue that they would like to change so that they can look up background information if they wish to do so. Students will need some knowledge about letters and how they are used to communicate with

others. There are very little resources needed for this lesson since it largely relies on the student's ability to write and think creatively. Students can reflect upon the *Ragtime* audio clips "Make Them Hear You" and "He Wanted to Say" to remember the importance of making one's voice and story heard.

The content material used during this lesson will be Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*. Students will use their reading of this novel to facilitate their creative letter writing about social change and defining one's story.

This lesson is linked to the lessons to follow because I will always encourage my students to write creatively and take chances whenever they feel appropriate. It is also very important that student continue to establish their identity and their own voice throughout their writings for the remainder of the school year. Later in the unit, students will be doing a social activism project, and this lesson helps to get students thinking about making changes and making their voices and opinion heard.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- relate their personal lives to their reading of *In the Skin of a Lion*
- effectively write letters to others
- think about social issues today
- tell some of their own story and define what they think is important to tell about oneself
- combine knowledge from many lessons in their creative writing

MATERIALS

Blank paper, 1 pack, for students to write letters

3-5 extra copies of *In the Skin of the Lion* for students who forgot their text

Timer

PowerPoint with instructions for the current letter stage

PREPARATION

I will need to make sure I have plenty of paper for the student before they arrive. I will need to make sure I can display the timer on the board so that the activity will be completed on time. I also need to have the bell work question on the board and ready for students at their arrival. I will need to make sure that the PowerPoint is ready and assessable so that I can project it during the activity so students know what stage we are on and what they should be writing about.

PROCEDURE

Bell work (5 minutes)

- Students will write in the journals reflecting on the following questions: Do you write letters to people? Do you receive letters? Do you like sending/receiving letters? Why? What's the best/worst letter you have ever received?

Creative Writing Letter Activity Introduction (5 minutes)

- Explain to students that they are going to be writing letters to anyone of their choosing. There will be a prompt displayed on the board and the students will write for 10 minutes. Then they will "mail" their letter to a classmate, who will read and then reply to the letter for 10 minutes. The students must write the letter from their own person.
- The timer will be displayed showing students how much time they have left to write.

- Students should aim to mention something they have learned from this unit in their letters and responses.

First Letter (10 minutes)

- Students are to write the first letter, addressed to anyone of their choosing, about some type of change that they would like to see in society. This can be inspired by the book, or it can be any change they feel passionate about.

First Letter Response (10 minutes)

- Students will swap letters with someone around them.
- Each peer will respond from the point of view of the person that the letter was written.
- The responder must put their own name somewhere on the letter to get points for the activity.

Second Letter (10 minutes)

- Students are to write their second letter, addressed to the person of their choosing, telling them a part of their history or story. We have talked a lot in class about the importance of telling one's story and making one's voice heard, and this is an opportunity for the student to do so.

Second Letter Response (10 minutes)

- Students will swap letter with someone different than they did for the first letter swap.
- Each student responds to his or her peer's letter from the person to which the letter was addressed.
- The responder must put their own name somewhere on the letter to get points for the activity.
- Student will turn in the letters at the end of the period. I will look at the students' letters and return them to the students later in the week.

DISCUSSION IDEAS

- What would you like to see change in society?
- If you could protest something, what would you protest?
- What do you think about our class's reading of *In the Skin of a Lion*?
- If you had to tell your story to your child one day, what would you tell them?
- Is there anything that hasn't changed since the time period of the novel (1913-1938) that you would like to see change?
- What does writing a letter allow you to do that writing a formal paper cannot?
- Who do you want to write to? Why?

LANGUAGES ACCOMMODATIONS

For the Spanish-speaking student, I will allow him to use a computer to write on so he can use translation assistance and can participate in the activity. This way, the student can write letters that his peers will be able to read and reflect on. I will have the peer who reads and responds to his letters also do so on the computer so he can also use the translation of the English response in Spanish if necessary. This student can fix his work at home if he would like, or just email me the progress made during class. For the students who speak AAE, I will allow them to write in their language if it adds to the content of the letter, but will encourage them to exchange papers with someone who will understand all the words so that they can fully understand the letter.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ACCOMMODATIONS

I will explain this activity to the student with EBD before class and make sure he understands that he does not have to speak with the peer he shares his paper with. If he is uncomfortable sharing his letters

with his peers, I can respond to his letter instead. I will make sure that I talk to this student before the activity to see what he is comfortable with, and I will make sure I check in with him during the activity to make sure he is staying on task and not getting distracted. For the blind student, I will have them write on the computer so that they can see their own writing, but then the peer reading can decrease to a more easily read size. I will also have a selected peer write on a computer as well so that the student with the visual impairment will be able to enlarge the font of the letter and respond. These students will be able to email me their work in order to turn it in for assessment.

ASSESSMENT

I will collect the students' letters and assess their work by using the rubric attached to the end of this lesson plan. I want the students to take the opportunity to use their creative writing skills to think more critically about the things we have been discussing in this unit. I hope that by having students write letters, they will start to find their own voice. I will check for students' ability to form an argument and support it, to take on an identity and tell their own story, and to demonstrate something they have learned so far in the unit.

EXTENSION IDEAS

Possible extension ideas are to have students maintain a letter writing activity each week. I could have students have pen pals in class who have to exchange at least 3-5 letters a week about classroom content and turn the letters in at the end of the week. This could be a fun way to get students thinking about classroom content on a more personal level with a peer. This activity could also be extended into taking on the persona of a character and writing letters more relevant to the novel. While this activity would be less about finding the student's choice, it would be a good way to assess for understanding of the novel. Lastly, students could take their social change letters and actually send the letter to someone in an effort to make a change. By actually sending the letter, students could seek social activism and take action for their beliefs.

SOURCE OF ACTIVITY

This activity was inadvertently derived from the idea of the silent conversation I learned in Professor Arlette Willis's classroom. I think it can be very effective for students to communicate with one another, but often times it is very easy to get off topic. Writing their conversation down without conversing aloud allows for discussion to occur but with decreased distractions. The need to accommodate all students was influenced by my experiences in the Curriculum and Instruction classrooms of Professor Arlette Willis and Hilarie Welsh. The idea to use letters was influenced by Patrick's letter writing as well as the letter writing activity I did Amanda's Larson's psychology class. We wrote letters to our peers that helped up to voice our concerns and feelings about the class and this helped us to bring our own identities into the classroom.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

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ILLINOIS STATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GOALS

Knowledge Indicator 6D: The competent teacher understands writing processes and their importance to content learning.

This knowledge indicator is met by my lesson by my incorporation of a different method of writing. I understand that writing is not only formal essay writing, but also creative writing and believe that this is equally important to the content learning in the classroom. Students are learning about the themes of the novels as they enhance their creative writing abilities through the creation of letters about identity and taking a social stance.

Performance Indicator 8M: The competent teacher uses digital tools and resources to promote collaborative interactions.

My lesson plan addresses this performance indicator because I accommodate the needs of my students with special needs by incorporating the use of a computer word processor to promote them to collaborate and work with others in the class. My Spanish-speaking student and my student who is blind are able to participate in this classroom activity by using a word processor to prevent any language or sight barriers from causing difficulties.

COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

This standard is met by my lesson plan because students use the letter to write their own personal story or narrative. Students have to write specific details or events to get the story of their identity across during only ten minutes so they must be selective and well structured in order to get their story across to the person reading their letter.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3d Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

This standard is met by my lesson because students must choose their language and details carefully to get their message across in the letter. In order to tell their story or to detail a social problem, the students will have to explain the event and setting so that the letter reader has an understanding of what is happening. Students are asked to tell their story and display their identity by telling stories about themselves or events in their lives.

Rubric for letter writing activity

	5	4	3	2	1
Student writes one letter for change					
Student writes one letter about their story					
Student responds to a peer's letter for change					
Student incorporates information from the unit into their letters					
Student supports their ideas and arguments with evidence					