

April newsletter 2013

Intro: Finally, spring has sprung, winter is past, and summer's but a stone's throw away! Barb, Dea, and the whole EW team wish you a happy spring! This month, we'll use the springtime theme as inspiration for a craft project, classroom poll-taking and opinion writing, using research as the launching pad.

Lesson: Signs of Spring

Here's what you'll do:

- 1.) Explain to the class that they'll be exploring possibilities for a spring-inspired craft project. Ask if they can think of the best way to come up with a craft idea. They might suggest books, magazines, or suggest talking to a crafty person they know. Some might suggest looking online.
- 2.) Continue the conversation, and ask them how they might go about finding craft ideas online. Brainstorm a search word or phrase to try. List some possibilities and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each:
Ex.
spring projects *spring craft projects* *spring projects for kids*
spring craft projects for kids
- 3.) Demonstrate how to narrow your search, and discuss how this will deliver sites more relevant to your purpose. (Be sure to try this in advance so you can select age and content-appropriate sites.) Here are a few sites you might find helpful: <http://spoonful.com/spring/spring-crafts>
<http://www.parenting.com/gallery/easy-spring-crafts-kids>
<http://dltk-holidays.com/spring/crafts.html>
- 4.) Peruse the directions for various crafts. Ask the children if they would be able to follow the steps to complete the craft. Why or why not? Discuss the importance of sequencing and clear instructions.
- 5.) Offer the class several craft options discovered through their research. Be sure to discuss the viability of each in terms of materials needed, time required, etc. Then, have the children vote on which project they'd like to undertake. Tally their votes to determine what the majority of students prefer. Be sure to frame the results in the language of opinion – *The majority of the class prefers... Our poll reveals that... The popular choice is... Most students favor...* (Optional math connection – translate the poll results into a statistic or percentage.)

6.) On another day, have the students complete the craft, following the directions provided. Be sure to tell them to use any photos or illustrations provided as well as the written instructions to clarify the procedure.

7.) Finally, ask students to think about the project and the resulting craft they completed. Have them consider the experience and determine whether or not they enjoyed it, and why or why not. Ask them to write an *opinion paragraph* explaining how they felt about the experience. Be sure to post a number of thought-inspiring questions and corresponding sentence starters to inspire critical thinking, good word choice, and varied sentence structure. Students can use and modify them as needed.

Ex.

Why did you like (or dislike) this project?

What aspect of it did you find challenging?

If you could do it again, what would you do differently?

Would you consider undertaking this project again, and if so why?

What might you do with the item you created?

What advice would you offer someone else undertaking this?

What does the finished product make you think of or remind you of?

How did you feel about the work you did?

I enjoyed this project because _____. It was fun to _____.

The hard part was _____. I found it challenging when _____.

If I tried this again _____. Next time I might _____.

I might consider _____ because _____. I think I will _____.

If you're considering _____ I'd advise _____.

Before you try this be sure to _____.

Each time I look at _____ I'm reminded of _____.

Thinking about completing this _____.

Teaching Tips:

Before approaching any writing task, ***take some time to ensure that students have adequate background to inform the task.*** Whatever the topic or theme, begin with related literature and topical nonfiction. Some visual learners benefit from a video experience, or photographs. For example, if writing about exploring a cave, collect some books on the subject, check out appropriate online images or video clips. Students, especially those who may have limited enrichment experiences at home, really respond to this kind of stimulation. ***Remember - experience doesn't have to be first-hand to be valuable, thought-provoking, and inspiring.*** If young authors are expected to only draw upon their first-hand experiences, then only those coming from enriched backgrounds would have the potential to be good writers! On the contrary, most fiction writers

routinely write about things they've researched and experienced vicariously. They do not limit themselves to first-hand experiences to inform their work. Also, when modeling ask, "what if... and why not?" to inspire plot. And remember – nothing inspires students more than your passion and enthusiasm for the topic – excitement is contagious!