



Content Area Literacy Task Force



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Memorable Memories Rhonda Orttenburger, Social Studies/Language Arts

As the year draws to a close, my students need to reflect on life as fourth graders. Each student creates a *Memorable Memories Journal* to take home with them so they will always remember what they accomplished in fourth grade. I give each child a picture of themselves that I take with my camera. After decorating their journals with the picture and other supplies, students are then given a list of questions to answer that result in reflection. I did not create many of these questions, but instead begged, borrowed, and stole from teachers, articles, and the Internet. Students are allowed to add pictures, drawings, and other items to make it personal. Some of the questions I include are below, but I also ask students to submit questions.

1. What are the three most important things you learned this year?
2. What is one thing you learned this year that you think will help you succeed in life?
3. What was the hardest part of this year?
4. Think about how you performed as a student this year. What could you do to improve your school performance next year?
5. What would you tell next year's students that would help them succeed in fourth grade?
6. We read many books this year. Which one was your favorite? Why?
7. We wrote in many different genres this year. What was your best piece of writing? Why do you consider it your best piece?
8. Who did you become friends with this year? Why did you choose to become friends with them?
9. Bullying was a problem this year in fourth grade. What are some ways we can work together to prevent bullying at school?
10. If you could change one thing that happened this year, what would it be?
11. What are three things you did this year to help your classmates?
12. What is something we did this year that you will remember for the rest of your life?

When students finish this journal, they have a lasting collection of snippets of fourth grade to keep and to share with their families. It's a memorable way to end the year.

Reflection in Social Studies

Maggie Brewer, Social Studies

In World Civilization we finish up the year with a unit called “Today’s World” and the concept of globalization – the idea that we are all connected. In addition to review, this is the perfect point for reflection on everything we have learned as a class and how it has changed us as people. In teaching the concept of globalization I use a writing assignment, modified slightly, from an idea that was given to me by my ECU Writing Project friend, Susan Cintra, a wonderful English and journalism teacher at Madison Central High School. Susan shared an assignment she does with her students using a video called “Where the Hell is Matt.”

In the video, a young man named Matt Harding travels around the world dancing, first by himself and later with small and large groups of people to show our connectedness as humans. Matt then wrote a “This I Believe” essay for NPR called “Dancing to Connect to a Global Tribe” in which he explained how he started his dancing journey, gained a sponsor to continue traveling and dancing, and what he learned in the meantime.

Susan’s English classes wrote “This I Believe” essays in the format of the NPR column and danced together in the style of Matt’s video. My students also wrote “This I Believe” essays. We then videotaped each student’s belief statement and set the video to the same music that accompanies Matt’s video using iMovie. The finished product is overwhelming for me to watch.

The process of watching Matt’s video and seeing how the people of the world moved him provided the perfect jumping off point for my students. His belief statement was a mentor text that guided them as they wrote their own essays and acted as a reference point when they got stuck along the way. The resulting pieces were well written, thoughtful, and from the heart. Ultimately, as you watch our video, you can see that there are many students whose belief statements were very personal, they speak of what is meaningful to them be that a sport, religious belief, or a hobby, rather than what unifies the world. Others were able to grasp that globalization is pulling that world together in a way that unites us through music, laughter, love, technology, or concern for the environment. Regardless, the introspection and progress I saw from each one of my students was rewarding at the end of our year together.

Some teachers choose to have their students submit their “This I Believe” essays to NPR. The guidelines are on ThisIBelieve.org Students whose essays are chosen are invited to read their essays for NPR.

Matt’s Video is [Where the Hell is Matt?](#) (this is the video Susan showed me and I showed my students, but Matt has newer and older videos on his webpage: WheretheHellisMatt.com and they are all wonderful!)

To read Matt’s essay: [“Dancing to Connect a Global Tribe”](#)

Reflection in the Mathematics Classroom

Lee Alan H. Roher, Ed.D., Mathematics

I try to use reflection in mathematics at the end of each unit. Two to three days before the unit is finished or before the unit assessment, I ask my students to write an outline of the major topics covered in the unit. Then, I have the students write the subtopics into the outline. Included in the subtopics would be important ideas regarding a topic and types of problems that are applicable to the content. At this point, students should be able to discuss or write what problems would represent this content, how those problems are solved, and identify common errors made for each type of problem. Once the student has a completed outline, I have the students reflect on their personal strengths and weaknesses regarding the mathematics used for the content. In studying for the assessment, I have the students focus on the content that they have difficulties with, rather than spending time studying the content that they have mastered.

For the first unit in a course, I create the outline for the students in a large group setting. The second unit, also in a large group, I have the students give suggestions for creating the outline. Then, the students have their individual reflection after the large group has created the outline. After the first two units, I let the class work in small groups to create the content outline, with an ultimate goal that by the end of the course each individual student can create their own study outline and reflect personal areas of strength and weaknesses.

Some students need to complete this reflection in a written format. Other students need to complete this reflection orally with a study partner, a parent, or a teacher. The idea is for the student to be able to communicate the mathematics showing understanding which would demonstrate the student's personal ownership of the knowledge.

Reflection in the Mathematics Classroom

Amanda Pasley Terry, Mathematics

Reflective writing is not only my favorite type of writing personally, it is also my favorite type of writing to teach in my math classroom. Reflective writing sheds light on how my students are learning, what they loved and how they feel about the process. In having my students reflect on what they have done and how they felt about the process, I learn not only what my students see as personal struggles in the area of mathematics but also what they feel good about. I allow my students to be completely honest about their feelings the first few times we reflect on our work but as the year moved on I use this as a teaching moment to broaden my students' vocabulary.

In my classroom, reflection is done regularly both verbally and through writing. In using writing to reflect I ask my students tell me their feelings on the task at hand, they are asked to tell what they have done well, what they need more help with, and I allow the students to ask questions, if they have any. This process is informal and because I work with younger children I usually allow them to read their work to me to make sure I understand what they are trying to say. The reflective writing is one that I allow my students to share with the class if they desire but it is not a requirement. It has been enlightening for my students to see that they are not the only ones struggling and it has opened the door for my students to better learn from each other.

End of the Year Reflection Prompt Lisa Antoniou, Science

As an end of the year reflective piece, my students respond to the following prompt:

1. At the beginning of the year I asked you to write what the word science meant to you. Today, after having another year of science, I would like you to write what the word science means to you today.
2. Write about your favorite unit of study this past year. Tell why it was your favorite by giving specific examples of activities we completed, etc.

After time is given to write, we will discuss student thoughts about science. Not only does this give them an opportunity to look back on what they have learned, but also allows me to see what stood out to my students the most and which areas I should work to improve upon for the next school year.

Reflection in Music Sandy Allen, Music

I must admit that I rarely do an end of the year reflective writing with my elementary music students. Most of the reflection takes the form of letting students pick their favorite songs, dances and games that they've learned during the year and singing them again during the last two or three music classes of the year. I'm always surprised by what stands out in their minds the most.

This year, my fourth and fifth grade students have been keeping a journal. Part of the journal contains vocabulary definitions, while the back portion is reserved for reflective writing. After we complete a unit or experience a performance, either live or on video, students take time to reflect, analyze, and/or critique in writing. This year, the last reflection will be to look back over the year's activities and pick their favorite. Then, they will write a response to the following prompt:

- Look back through your "reflection section."
- Describe your favorite activity or performance in music class this year.
- Why was this meaningful to you?
- What do you feel you learned from this activity?

After completing the writing, students will be given a chance to share what they wrote with the class.

This newsletter is a publication of the Eastern Kentucky University Writing Project

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Reflective Resources Collected by Katie McClain Library Media Specialist

-Day by Day: Refining Writing Workshop Through 180 Days of Reflective Practice by Ruth Ayres

-Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning by David Boud, Rosemary Keogh, and David Walker

-The English Teacher's Companion by Jim Burke

-Writing as Reflective Action: A Reader by Duncan Carter

-Creative Journal Writing: The Art and Heart of Reflection by Stephanie Dowrick

-Teaching Children to Think by Robert Fisher

-So What's the Story?: Teaching Narrative to Understand Ourselves, Others, and the World by James Fredricksen, Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, and Michael Smith

-The True Secret of Writing: Connecting Life with Language by Natalie Goldberg

-Journal Keeping: How to Use Reflective Writing for Learning, Teaching, Professional Insight and Positive Change by Dannelle D. Stevens

-Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom: Being the Book and Being the Change by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm