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Teaching of Comp.

Final Project

Due: 12/13/10

I have written and rewritten this introduction, trying to find the perfect way to explain why I made a holocaust unit plan for the book *Night* by Elie Wiesel. I have been brought to tears by what I have read and what I have seen about the holocaust prior to and during this project. As a future educator I want my students to develop a passion for not only learning, but for life. *Night* by Elie Wiesel is a true story of the author's life at Auschwitz Concentration Camp during WWII. He writes it from the perspective of his fifteen year old self, which allows a middle level student to relate and engage. When assigning literature for writing in my classroom, I knew that this book would take them to a different place, it would allow them to think beyond their years and write from the depths of their hearts. Each piece of the syllabus has been planned and developed for my students to get the absolute most out of this book and for their writing to truly shine.

In Margot Soven's book *Teaching Writing in the Middle and Secondary Schools*, she explains the importance of free writing in Chapter 3 and how it allows the students ideas to formulate on paper, she also mentions that in the sociocultural approach, writing in journals allows students to think outside the box and relate the text to their own lives. Vicki A. Jacobs mentions the use of journal prompts for free writing in her article *Reading, Writing and Understanding*. I don't feel like I could ask a student to write an essay before they have written their ideas, so I developed 4 week's worth of journal prompts all pertaining to the book *Night* for

the students to reflect upon every day. Some of the prompts require a higher order of thinking, but many of them are opinion based and are very student friendly. The journals will be graded based on a pass/fail level. Either the student has read the assigned chapters and reflected on them in their journal each day with effort, or they haven't. The journal prompts are a precursor to the final essay that will be assigned at the end of the unit.

I decided to also incorporate vocabulary quizzes into my unit plan because I feel that when a student is reading a higher order of thinking book such as *Night* it would be beneficial for them to understand some of the more difficult words. Many of the words I incorporated in the quizzes not only apply to the book but to real life as well. Soven mentions in chapter 8, *Composition Curricula: Four Approaches*, in the correctness approach, the importance of handling issues such as grammar, punctuation and spelling. Although the correctness approach is not my personal style of teaching, I do believe that it has a place in every English classroom. In order for my students to write and reflect upon the literature I have assigned they must be able to comprehend words and know the meaning of those words which is why I have included the vocabulary quizzes. In the article *Think Before You Write*, author Joanna Hawkins addresses even further the importance of having students acquire content knowledge before they sit down and write.

In the article titled *Think Before You Write*, Joanna Hawkins explains the importance of having your students interact and verbally discuss an assignment before they begin to write. She states that many times we ask our students to write from insufficient knowledge, before they know what they are talking about. In order to avoid this learning gap in my classroom I have incorporated Active Reading worksheets from Glencoe that allow students to write down their thoughts and important moments in the book as they read. Then, every Friday the students will

be separated randomly into discussion groups where they can share their thoughts and opinions from that week's readings. I felt that an activity like this would help students at every learning level because it is always beneficial to hear someone else's point of view. It also stimulates ideas that can be transferred into writing. Active Reading and in class discussions also relate to an instructional method for teaching literary analysis for at risk secondary students.

Story Grammar, is an instructional process that enables students to use their knowledge of how stories are structured to help them remember important details. According to the article *Teaching Literature to At-Risk Students* by Russell Gersten and Joseph Dimino. Story Grammar is used to improve a student's comprehension, which is crucial when teaching the book *Night* because while some students may immediately take to it, other students may struggle to comprehend it and give up which is not what I want. The Active Reading worksheets allow students who struggle with reading comprehension to pick out basic things that are crucial to understanding the story such as character analysis, plot, and main events. If all of my students are able to apply this book to their own lives, it will be as Gernstein and Dimino state in their article, a revelation for low achieving students.

The first writing assignment that I developed for the unit is a poetry project. Each student will be writing a reflective poem about the holocaust and it will be incorporated into a class book entitled: We Haven't Forgotten You: The Holocaust Poetry Project. This project incorporates group work, choice of style and also publication. The students will be doing peer revisions with this project as well as personal one on one revision's with me. The students will be graded upon participation, creativity and content, rough draft (s), peer revisions, personal revisions, and a final draft.

I developed this poetry project prior to reading the article For All the Children Who Were Thrown Away by Daniel A. Brown, but the article assured me that this project will enlighten my students a great deal. Daniel Brown is a middle school teacher who took a similar approach to teaching the Holocaust in his classroom as I plan to in mine. He mentions that he starts by introducing the students to less graphic photos of the holocaust because he wants to instill a sense that the children who died in the holocaust were humans, they were not the skeletons that we often times see in photos. I found this very important because the holocaust can be a very disturbing topic and I want my students to know the truth but I do not want them to be emotionally harmed. The author had his students write reflective holocaust poems to the children who died at Auschwitz Concentration Camp as if the children were still alive. He then went to Auschwitz to the State Museum and left the poems in one of the blocks that contains children's shoes sweaters, and remnants of inhumanities smallest victims. As I read I could not help to feel emotional because this teacher wanted his students to feel the same thing I want my students to feel about the holocaust, compassion and understanding.

The final writing assignment that I made is a final essay that requires the students to choose one of three prompts to write a narrative essay about. I chose to do this last because I really feel that it will show the student's development in not only thinking, but writing. The prompts are very similar to the journal prompts that the students will have worked with the entire semester, they just require more thought and precision when going through the writing process. Soven mentions in her book that a good final assignment incorporates sentence structure, the writing process, revision and documentation. Everything comes full circle in the end and that's what I hope my students are able to express in their writing with this final essay. The essay will be graded on an A, B, C, I scale with I being incomplete. The students will be given

opportunities for peer revisions, personal revisions and one on one student teacher conferences. They are provided with a checklist so that they are able to see if their paper contains the things that will be graded most heavily on.

Revision takes a huge priority in both of the writing assignments that I given in this unit. I feel that revision should be emphasized even at a young age. By allowing my students to start off with peer revisions and then move into student- teacher conferences about what can be revised I feel that the student may be more comfortable revising what they have written. I also offer in class revision workshops a few days prior to the due date of the paper, I think this allows the student to ask last minute questions and have their peers as well as myself review their final drafts before they hand them in. Soven addresses revision in chapter 3 of her book and she gives several reasons why students hate to revise: Writing is hard, and after all the work we put into it, we do not want to delete it. We fall in love with our own words, it is hard to resee the material from the point of view of the audience. Beginning writers often times do not like to read their own work, especially young student writers. All three of Soven's reasons why students do not like to revise are very true and are things that I want to try and eliminate from the minds of my students.

You never know what is going to work in a classroom, until you try it. I made this lesson plan to the very best of my ability with the hope that I can someday use it in my classroom. Soven writes in chapter 9 that as a teacher researcher we must constantly be writing a adjusting our lesson plans to keep up with the needs of students. I found this extremely powerful because it seems easy to get into a rut of teaching the same exact lessons year after year. Many of the things in my unit plan may not work, and some of them may be extremely beneficial to my students. I am going to keep a journal of how things work and how my students respond to certain activities

so that I know what I can do in order to be a better teacher. Revision does stop when you are no longer a student writer.

We must never underestimate the abilities of our students. I understand that to some using this book as the focal point of a Holocaust unit in an 8th grade classroom may seem overly ambitious, but this book can teach a child so many things about not only analyzing literature and writing but history and life. I could have my students watch a documentary or read from a history book to learn about the holocaust and then tell them to write, but I wanted to assign something that would paint a mental picture in their minds that would never fade. By using journals, poetry, and a narrative essay I believe I will be able to see how my students are reacting to the literature as well as how they are growing as writers. As Soven mentions in chapter eight of Teaching Writing in Middle and Secondary Schools, eventually everything you teach will come together. You will be able to see what works and what needs to be revised. Revision is a never ending process. I will constantly revise my lesson plans according to how my students react to them. I want my students to put the same amount of life and passion into their writing as I put into my lesson plans.

“No, I cannot teach this book. I simply want the words to burn their comfortable souls and leave them scarred for life.”

- Thomas E. Thorton

Works Cited

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<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/night.html>