



Creative Writing Mini Lessons

Anonymous Reading Questions

Goal: Encourage students to ask questions and/or to give structure to class discussions

Writing Activity:

Give each student a sticky note as they enter the room. Ask each student to write a question about the homework, coursework, or reading from the night/day before. Students should NOT sign their names, so everyone should feel comfortable writing any question, no matter how basic.

As the students hand you their Post-Its, quickly read through them (perhaps as the students pull out their books/notebooks/laptops for class) and arrange them on the board according to level of sophistication. This way, you can ask students, as a class, to address questions of clarity and comprehension before moving onto higher level discussion or more complicated topics, depending on the subject area.

Looking for more resources? Check out our teaching writing resources page and sign up for the monthly newsletter.

Choice Reading

Goal: To promote more independent reading

Writing Activity:

Choose one night each week where the only homework is to read independently—or more nights per week if possible! This might be a book that students are reading or an article from a newspaper or a passage of optional reading from your course textbook/supplemental texts.

At the beginning of the next class period, ask your students to write a response to a writing prompt related to their choice reading.

Example writing prompts:

- “Share something you learned, something you were unsure about in your reading, and something you were reminded of (a connection you can make) from the reading.”
- “Imagine you are a person/character in the text you read. What struggle are you facing, and what are your options for solving this issue? What support do you need from others in your life to confront this conflict, and why?”

To encourage honesty, allow students to write “I did not read last night,” followed by a response to a different writing prompt. Writetheworld.org has a variety of prompts to choose from, or you can create a prompt about something in your curriculum; current events; or ideas for improving your school/community/neighborhood.

Ask two students to share their writing (if they’re uncomfortable reading aloud, they can also summarize their response or reflect on their writing/thinking process) and whether they would recommend their choice reading to others. (Sharing aloud could always happen at the start of the next class period if there’s not time to both write and share at the same time.)

Consistency, choice, a sense of community, and low stakes (no grades) can help create a culture of independent reading and shows students that their independent work is an important component of your course and their time.

Writing In Other Subject Areas

Goal: To make writing part of your class across subject areas

Writing Activity:

Observations, lists, and reactions are wonderful ways to introduce writing in short bursts. In a science class, ask students to write one sentence explaining something they noticed during a lab, demonstration, or when looking at a graph.

Then, share these single-sentence observations aloud, and ask students to write a sentence about any observations they didn’t hear shared aloud yet (and then share these aloud again, thereby creating a collectively thorough recording of the activity). This activity allows students to go beyond surface level thinking with a second round of writing.

Additionally, in a history class, for example, ask students to pause during a lesson and write a list of words or reactions about a particular topic. These lists and initial reactions can be shared aloud to show the teacher and students alike which details are resonating with the class, which topics might be of interest for further independent reading, and where there might be some relevance to today’s society in terms of the connections students make, and emotions they feel, about a curricular topic.

Practice Peer Review

Goal: To position students for productive, respectful peer review in your writing classroom.

Writing Activity:

Acquaint students with the process of offering and receiving feedback through a “1+1 Share.” This rapid-fire activity invites students to read a portion of their work aloud, no matter its genre or stage in the drafting process; then, their partner offers a “1+1” response, meaning one appreciation (a line that stood out to them, a powerful word, a meaningful moment of dialogue) and one question or suggestion for improvement. Partners can then switch roles, so both gain practice reviewing and being reviewed.

If time permits, you can also facilitate “1+1 sharing” as a class, going round-robin as students share their collective reactions to a given student’s work.