

Workshop 5

Teaching Multigenre Writing

Overview

Workshop 5 centers on multigenre writing, an eclectic approach to writing instruction that offers students a wide range of options for expressing ideas and communicating knowledge. As students explore different avenues for translating what they think or know into writing, they begin to understand that there is no single “right way” to communicate. Instead, writing demands intelligent, informed choices based on purpose, audience, content, and personal preference. Giving students the freedom to make these choices fosters their creativity and increases their engagement in the process.

The first teacher featured in the video is Laurie Swistak from Newport, Rhode Island, whose fifth-graders are starting work on a research-based multigenre unit. Laurie begins by reviewing FQI—Facts, Questions, Interpretation—an inquiry framework that helps students think critically about genre choice. Through the course of two class periods, we see Laurie use a skillful mix of whole-class and small-group work to prepare her students to use FQI independently.

In the second part of the video, we see St. Paul teacher Mary Cathryn Ricker and her seventh-grade students approach multigenre writing from a different angle. Over the next few months, the students will prepare a portfolio of multigenre pieces focused on personal experience. To get the students started, Mary Cathryn introduces several literary models including Jerry Spinelli’s entertaining memoir, *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, and a collection of biographical poems about George Washington Carver. Later, we see her use a student poem—written in both English and Spanish—as a prompt, a particularly apt choice for her class of English language learners.

Also featured in the video are excerpts from a conversation between Mary Cathryn and Laurie, held at the end of the school year, and from an interview with Tom Romano, the author of *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers* and a national expert on multigenre writing.

Workshop 5 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Mary Cathryn Ricker, Grade 7, Cleveland Quality Middle School, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Laurie Swistak, Grade 5, Cranston-Calvert Elementary School, Newport, Rhode Island

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the FQI lesson plan for Laurie Swistak and the multigenre unit plan for Mary Cathryn Ricker, available at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/. These plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students’ writing.
- Reading the article provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 5 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the article in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 5,” available on the next page and on the Web site.

Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 5

“Teaching Multigenre Writing” demonstrates the following effective practices for teaching writing in general and for teaching multigenre writing specifically:

- Teachers choose an approach to writing that reveals a broad definition of genre and that enables students to communicate in a variety of forms for a variety of purposes and readers. The range of options stimulates students’ interest in their work and gives them experience in writing in various realistic forms.
- Teachers reveal their appreciation of the diversity of interests and cultural backgrounds in their classes. The approach establishes a meaningful reason for writing, which improves the odds for students’ development as writers, and it also indicates the teachers’ affirmation of their students, as well as the importance of differentiating practices to meet the needs of students.
- In the multigenre project, teachers promote student ownership as writers and as learners. Students consider options for genres, as well as topics they may focus on. Such ownership, choice, and decision-making are important influences on student writers.
- Each teacher establishes a specific structure and logical method of guiding the students in their work, for example the FQI (facts, questions, interpretation) method demonstrated by one teacher and the autobiography project demonstrated by another. Though students have many options, teaching practices are intentional and well organized.
- The teachers prompt students’ curiosity, leading them to inquiry that is significant to them. Writing is for a genuine, meaningful-to-student purpose. Students investigate and recognize that writing is a mode of learning and discovery. The purpose of multigenre writing is not merely to gain experience in writing a variety of forms.
- Ample opportunity is provided for students to talk about possibilities and to help each other in the project. Teachers emphasize that the students are part of a community and should support and help each other. Class activities reveal the efforts of students and teacher to work in a supportive community.
- Teachers read often to the students, and the students themselves read to understand different genres, as well as to learn about their topics. Reading serves both to engage the students and to teach them about the genres. Reading aloud is especially important for students who are early learners of English.
- Both teachers and classmates respond to students’ work through whole-class discussion, small-group work, and teacher–student conferences.
- Teachers provide appropriate examples and help students understand how they can learn about different genres. With the variety inherent in multigenre writing, having examples available is especially important. Students are challenged to read carefully to determine the characteristics of a chosen genre, and, of course, teachers provide information to help students.

Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 5

This outline of the Workshop 5 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

Segment 1 (0:00–12:14)	Introduction (beginning at 0:00)	
	In the Classroom (beginning at 7:12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modeling FQI (facts and questions) 	Laurie Swistak
Segment 2 (12:15–30:21)	In the Classroom (beginning at 12:15)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modeling FQI (interpretations/genres) 	Laurie Swistak
	Interview (beginning at 19:48) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining genre broadly 	Tom Romano
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 20:51) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching a variety of genres 	Mary Cathryn Ricker and Laurie Swistak
	In the Classroom (beginning at 23:46) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying FQI to student-selected research topics 	Laurie Swistak
	Interview (beginning at 28:03) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of imagination in multigenre writing 	Tom Romano
Segment 3 (30:22–42:25)	In the Classroom (beginning at 30:22)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing an autobiographical genre Mining for topics in the writer's notebook 	Mary Cathryn Ricker Mary Cathryn Ricker
Segment 4 (42:26–end)	In the Classroom (beginning at 42:26)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching a mini-lesson on memoir Using a bilingual model 	Mary Cathryn Ricker Mary Cathryn Ricker
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 54:12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a multigenre approach 	Mary Cathryn Ricker and Laurie Swistak

Workshop Session

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- Based on your pre-workshop reading, share an assignment or unit you believe might work well as a multi-genre project. What makes this assignment a good choice for multigenre writing? What genres do you think this assignment might generate?
- What do you see as possible obstacles to introducing multigenre writing in your classroom? What might you do to meet these challenges?

Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator's Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

Segment 1 (0:00-12:14)

[Pause point: After one of Laurie's students goes to the board to share a question generated by her group.]

- What instructional and classroom management techniques does Laurie use to encourage her students to take ownership of the facts and questions about Charles Dickens?
- Laurie chooses to model FQI (Facts, Questions, Interpretations) using an author the children have studied (they read *A Christmas Carol* earlier in the school year). Do you think this is a good choice? What else might she have used as a model?

Segment 2 (12:15-30:21)

[Pause point: After Laurie's students discuss possible genres they might use for their own research topics.]

- What are the benefits of allowing students to write in a variety of genres, including non-academic ones such as obituaries or want ads? What are the possible drawbacks?
- Laurie says that she uses small-group instruction and models to help her students learn how to write specific genres. What other strategies could a teacher use to introduce her students to a broad range of genres?
- How does a formal structure like FQI help middle-level students with research and writing? Share your own successful strategies for encouraging inquiry in your classroom.

Segment 3 (30:22-42:25)

[Pause point: After one of Mary Cathryn's students shares the piece of writing she has mined from her writer's notebook.]

- Why do you think Mary Cathryn uses the list from Jerry Spinelli's *Knots in My Yo-Yo String* to begin her unit on autobiography?
- Most of Mary Cathryn's students are English language learners, and many of them are quite shy about responding in class. What strategies have you found to be effective in encouraging students to participate more fully in class activities and discussions?
- Discuss how keeping a notebook or journal might help middle-level students grow as writers. If you already have incorporated this practice into your classroom, share your management strategies with your colleagues (where you store the notebooks, when and how often students write in them, how the students use the notebooks with regard to other writing assignments, if and how you evaluate them, etc.).

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment 4 (42:25-end)

[View to end of program.]

- Mary Cathryn reads her students excerpts from two autobiographies, Walter Dean Myers's *Bad Boy: A Memoir* and Jerry Spinelli's multigenre autobiography, *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, along with a poem from Marilyn Nelson's *Carver: A Life in Poems*. Why do you think she chooses to read these examples herself rather than having the students read them?
- Mary Cathryn gives the students two sentences from *Knots in My Yo-Yo String* as possible starting points for their memoirs. Based on your own experience, how successful do you think this strategy would be in helping students generate writing? Is it ever appropriate to *require* students to use a specific starter for their writing?
- Share at least one successful strategy you've used to inspire students to write about personal experience.

Going Further (15 minutes)

- Think about the following questions and then share your responses and conclusions with your colleagues.
 - What approach do you use to teach writing based on research?
 - What are some specific ways in which your current approach to research has been successful? What pitfalls have you encountered?
 - Based on your reading and on what you observed in Laurie Swistak's classroom, what do you think would be the benefits of replacing the traditional research paper with a multigenre writing assignment?
- Imagine that you have decided to introduce a multigenre writing unit to your students. Would you do an autobiographical assignment, like Mary Cathryn, or a research assignment, like Laurie? What are your reasons for choosing one over the other?

Before Next Week

Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 5—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues.
- In the video, Tom Romano refers to a multigenre biography, Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. Mary Cathryn Ricker relies on Jerry Spinelli's multigenre autobiography, *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, as a model for her students' autobiographies. Look at one or both of these books and record your reactions to the book(s) in your workshop journal. Alternatively, examine one of Tom Romano's books on multigenre writing (*Writing With Passion* or *Blending Genre, Altering Style*) and record your responses about how his ideas might work in your classroom. (See "Selected Sources for 'Teaching Multigenre Writing'" on the following page for full bibliographical information for all four books.)

Background Reading for Workshop 6

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 6 provided on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/), including the teachers' reflections.
- Reading the articles provided under "Related Reading" on the Workshop 6 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the "Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 6," available in this guide and on the Web site.

Selected Sources for “Teaching Multigenre Writing”

Allen, Camille A. *The Multigenre Research Paper: Voice, Passion, and Discovery in Grades 4-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN: 032500319X.

Bowen, Barbara. “A Multi-Genre Approach to the Art of the Biographer.” *English Journal* 80.4 (April 1991): 53-55.

Dickson, Randi with Jon DeGraff and Mark Foard. “Learning About Self and Others Through Multigenre Research Papers.” *English Journal* 92.2 (November 2002): 82-90.

Glasgow, Jaqueline N. “Fusing Social Justice With Multi-Genre Writing.” *English Journal* 90.6 (July 2001): 62-66.

Glasgow, Jaqueline N. “Radical Change in Young Adult Literature Informs the Multi-Genre Paper.” *English Journal* 92. 2 (November 2002): 41-51.

Grierson, Sirpa T. “Circling Through the Text: Teaching Research Through Multi-Genre Writing.” *English Journal* 89 (September 1999): 51-55.

Grierson, Sirpa T. with Amy Anson and Jacoy Baird. “Exploring the Past Through Multi-Genre Writing.” *Language Arts* 80.1 (September 2002): 51-59.

Mack, Nancy. “The Ins, Outs, and In-Betweens of Multi-Genre Writing.” *English Journal* 92.2 (November 2002): 91-98.

Moulton, M. R. “The Multigenre Paper: Increasing Interest, Motivation, and Functionality in Research.” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 42 (1999): 528-539.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. New York: Penguin, 1990. ASIN: 0140072802.

Richison, Jeannie D., Anita C. Hernandez, and Marcia Carter. “Blending Multiple Genres in Theme Baskets.” *English Journal* 92.2 (November 2002): 76 through 81.

Romano, Tom. *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2000. ISBN: 0867094788.

Romano, Tom. *Writing With Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. ISBN: 0867093625.

Notes
