

Laurie Swistak's FQI Lesson

In January, Laurie Swistak's fifth graders at Cranston-Calvert School in Newport, Rhode Island begin a multigenre research unit based on people or events of historical significance. Over the course of the semester, the students produce at least ten pieces in ten different genres about their topics. The unit culminates in May with oral presentations for the students' parents.

During the project, Laurie collaborates with Dr. Camille Allen, who teaches education at nearby Salve Regina University. Dr. Allen's students serve as mentors, meeting with the fifth-graders once a week to assist them with research and writing.

To help the students organize their research and focus their inquiry, Laurie uses a strategy called FQI—facts, questions, and interpretations. Through reading and online searches, the students locate interesting facts about their topics. Then they think of questions related to those facts. Finally, they decide what interpretations or genres they could use to answer the questions.

The two-day lesson featured in Workshop 5 provides students with practice in FQI. Laurie begins by modeling the process for the class, and then the students start applying FQI to their individual topics.

Instructional Goals

The lesson on FQI helps Laurie's students to:

- Learn and practice FQI.
- Understand that there are many different ways to communicate information.
- Begin to analyze the characteristics of various genres.

Materials

Materials Used During FQI Lesson

Book

- Dickens, Charles. *Eyewitness Classics: Christmas Carol (DK Classics)*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999. ISBN: 0751362999.

Forms

- FQI sheet

Additional Materials Used in the Multigenre Unit

- List of Requirements for Multigenre Project
- List of Student Topics for Multigenre Project
- Selected Writing Forms for Multigenre Project
- Student-Generated List of Writing Forms for Multigenre Project
- Writing Rubric

Description of Lesson

All Laurie's fifth-grade language arts students have read *A Christmas Carol* as a class assignment. In preparation for the lesson on FQI, the students' homework assignment is to reread the margin notes in the book and list as many facts as they can about Charles Dickens.

The lesson begins with the students discussing their facts in small groups. Next they share their facts with the rest of the class, and Laurie records them on strips of paper on the board.

At this point, Laurie takes two or three facts and has the whole class brainstorm questions. Once the students grasp the concept of facts leading to questions, Laurie gives each small group three facts from the board and asks them to formulate questions. The groups record their questions on strips, and Laurie places them on the board beside the corresponding facts.

In whole-class discussion, Laurie asks the children to decide what interpretation or genre might be used to answer the questions. The students have recorded the facts and questions on FQI sheets at their desks. When someone suggests a particularly apt genre, Laurie has the class write it in the Interpretation column beside the related fact and question.

The next day, the students bring facts they have discovered about their own topics to class. Once more, they divide into groups, share their facts, and give each other ideas for questions. After the class brainstorms possible genres or interpretations to go along with the questions, the children return to their small groups to get help thinking of genres for their specific topics.

Throughout the semester, the students continue to collect facts, formulate questions, and come up with genres. Depending on her instructional goals and on the number of students who are writing a given genre, Laurie uses either whole-group or small-group instruction to help the students learn how particular genres work. Peer and teacher conferences also play an important role as the students draft, revise, and polish their pieces for their final project.