

Velvet McReynolds' Revision Lesson

Starting on the first day of school, Velvet McReynolds' seventh-graders assemble their quick writes and drafts in a writing portfolio. Over the course of the year, the students will select some of these pieces for revision and eventual publication. Velvet balances a workshop approach to writing instruction with the necessity of preparing the students for Alabama's state assessment. So her instructional planning always includes lessons and mini-lessons that incorporate state writing standards.

By the second semester, the students' portfolios include a minimum of two personal narratives—one written after Velvet read Mem Fox's *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* to the class—and the second inspired by a scene from *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. To help the students move these pieces along—and to insure that they meet the standards for writing narratives set by the state—Vivian suggests that the students focus on one of these two personal narratives for their special revision session. However, in keeping with the goal of providing student choice, she also allows them to choose some other piece from their portfolio, including quick writes.

Instructional Goals

Velvet's revision lesson enables students to:

- Identify elements of effective personal narratives and analyze how they work.
- Practice revision techniques.
- Apply elements of effective personal narratives to their own writing.
- Respond to the work of their classmates and receive feedback about their own work.
- Share their success with the class in a "celebration circle."

Materials

- "Untitled," a personal narrative about skipping school written by a middle school student (from Linda Rief's *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*, Portsmouth, RI: Heinemann, 1991).
- Exemplars on dialogue and introductions (sheets of excerpts from textbooks and other sources, along with illustrative examples)

Description of Lesson

Velvet's lesson on revision starts with her students reading a personal narrative written by a middle school student. Then Velvet divides the students into groups and asks them to analyze the personal narrative and prepare a list of its effective features. After they have completed this task, the groups report their findings to the rest of the class.

From the students' observations and based on the features they need to know in order to meet state standards, Velvet isolates three characteristics of an effective narrative: use of dialogue, sense of story (the element of surprise; the use of effective details; a clear beginning, middle, and end, etc.), and an introduction that captures the reader's interest. She provides brief mini-lessons on each of these topics and passes out "exemplars"—sheets of information and models—for dialogue and introductions. Instruction on punctuation and capitalization is embedded in her lesson on dialogue.

The students decide which pieces they are going to revise. In the margins, they indicate where and how they might make a change based on the lessons Velvet has presented. After the students work individually on the drafts, they share their revision ideas with the other members of their response groups and solicit their feedback.

The following day, the students take their drafts, any notes they made individually or in small group, and the two exemplars and go to the library. They use computers to type in the changes they have decided on, and then they print out the new version. Back in the classroom, Velvet has the class do self-assessments to determine how this revision activity has enhanced their writing. Then the revision lesson culminates with a celebration circle in which students read their original and revised versions.