

# READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

## Engaging Students in Authentic Reading and Writing Video Transcript

### **Jenee Ramos:**

Because I figured you all would be pretty good with thinking about engaging openings, and I just wanted to sort of bring it back to our attention, as you think about the self-editing checklists and what the peer commenters are looking for from you, I wanted to give you some time to really think a little more carefully about how you start.

We found that after their freshman year here kids were really sort of falling off of the cliff. We just couldn't figure out a way to motivate and inspire and engage kids, and we felt like we were losing them after freshman year.

Talking about the first paragraph, and how you get us in, okay?

We decided to use sophomore year as the year to offer some alternative courses. It's something that we've never done at this school in the English department. And so we decided we're going to make a real world, sort of a more humanities-based course, so that instead of taking the standard level course, which is World Lit, we'll offer a real world lit course, which allows kids to really sort of read more contemporary and relevant works in terms of their own lives, and do some writing about things that matter to them, and making some of those connections to their own lives. What we've tried to do is not only champion what kids want to do and what they want to read and what their interests are, but their own reflective writing around that, and their voices.

### **Student:**

The technique that this author used was dialogue to start the passage. And we said that it was somewhat effective, but it wasn't really engaging enough to, like, want you to keep reading, but it got you to start reading.

### **Ramos:**

What about the rest of the paragraph? Were you feeling the whole way that you weren't engaged?

**Student:**

If the author was trying to make it seem like this person was really lonely, he did a good job about that. But if it was something else, then I wouldn't have got it.

**Ramos:**

I did hear a little bit of a laugh when Adam read about the baby butterflies being birthed in the belly, and all that.

**Student:**

I think that was a good part, but it was too far down in the beginning to actually be as effective as it would be towards the top. Because then people would be like, "Oh, this is funny, I'll keep reading." Instead it's right at the bottom.

**Ramos:**

Okay, fair enough, fair enough.

The other thing that we feel strongly about is students' identities as readers -- how do you feel about yourself as a reader? In what way have you been supported, or your choices of things to read been supported? And, in some cases, kids felt like they had always been told what they needed to read. You know, you come to English class, and you've got to read these books, and I'm not interested in these books. I think that they love the idea of connecting some of what they've been thinking about and some of what they've been working on with folks beyond these walls.

**Dalia:**

We've done a lot of just, like, reflecting on what we read -- reactions, opinions -- and now we're making this magazine for the class, for everyone to take, so everyone's going to be able to submit two pieces to the magazine. We each have to edit three previous writings that we've done throughout the year. She wants us to publish some, or send some to other magazines. And I think it's great, because it's not specifically focused on, like, one genre. I think right now she's, like, letting us pick out which one we really enjoy doing.

**Ramos:**

This is real world lit, so potentially any number of people are in your audience. And how do you sort of subscribe to their interests, or how do you get across what you really are trying to say? So there's that piece, just sort of feeling empowered as readers and writers who deserve to be celebrated, and who have really powerful things to say, and can say them in a dialogue, but can also say it in writing.

**Sofi:**

I'm not excellent in school. Like, it's not the easiest thing for me. She's kind of opened my eyes to a lot of different styles of writing in the way she runs class. It's very free and open. She's one of the only teachers I've had who's really understood my writing.

**Ramos:**

For us, what's been the most rewarding and the most powerful about being effective teachers of literacy and helping empower our students to be better readers is the fact that we actually meet. We meet together to talk about problems of practice, and we do research together, we do reflections together. And being able to collaborate has meant the world to us. But I think the most powerful thing for us has been that the students are getting it. We're feeling like we're more powerful as teachers, because we've been able to talk over our issues with our colleagues. And then we get to go back to the classroom and try out some things that maybe we wouldn't have tried before.