

KQED Perspectives Unit Curriculum

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PUBLISHING and ASSESSMENT

Lesson 11: Reading and Recording Essays

One of the things that makes listening to Perspectives so engaging is that you hear the piece in the actual voice of the author. It's not a radio announcer's voice; it's the voice of a regular person.

Because one of the key goals of the Perspectives project is to write for an audience, it's important to think about how you will display the students' pieces. We created a webpage with the pieces, though an audio CD would work as well. If you don't want to include recording in your unit, you could also publish student Perspectives in a class magazine or dedicate a class to reading them aloud. If possible, it's helpful to have parent volunteers assist with recording. We were able to set up a MacBook equipped with the Garage Band application in a conference room. As students were ready to record, they signed up on the board. When one person finished, they sent the next person.

A great resource for recording audio is Audacity, a free audio editing program. Watch an educast about how to use Audacity at <http://www.kqed.org/radio/programs/perspectives/resources.jsp>. Audacity can be downloaded from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>.

Before students record their essays, we brainstorm strategies for effective reading aloud. Some of the strategies that appeared on the list are: speak slowly and clearly, read with expression, treat it like a conversation, don't try too hard, and practice before recording.

Lesson 12: Publishing Party!

I make a big deal about unveiling students' finished pieces. Students have put weeks of their time into these pieces, and they took risks to write about topics that are personal and important to them. As a class, we set a date for the publishing party and decide who will be invited. For the Perspectives Project, we kept it small, only inviting a few administrators and teachers.

I set up the room in a semi-circle, with the webpage that features the pieces projected in the middle. I brought in refreshments for students and our guests (hot water for tea and hot chocolate creates a cozy mood). Stacked slips of colored paper are on each desk. Students can volunteer to have their pieces played for the audience or they can opt out if they don't feel comfortable. Because we had worked hard to create a safe and respectful environment, I found that most of my students were willing to share their pieces.

After each Perspective is played, everyone writes one specific appreciation for the author on a slip of paper. These are then collected and delivered to the author at the end of class.

This stack of appreciations is sometimes incentive enough to share! Also, as the pieces are playing, if someone has a connection with something the author is saying, they snap their fingers. It was powerful for the students to hear snaps fill the room as their pieces played. After unveiling the Web page to the class, we sent the link out to the parent community. Parents were encouraged to leave appreciations as comments at the bottom of the page.

ASSESSMENT

I use the rubric as a final assessment of student work and then give them a grade for Content, Conventions, and Process. I also have students fill out a self-evaluation form based on the rubric. Students clip together all rubrics and drafts of their essay in chronological order and file these away into their finished writing folder.