

KQED Perspectives Unit Curriculum

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PREWRITING

Lesson 1: Choosing a Topic

Objectives:

- Students will be introduced to the project.
- Students will choose a topic that is personal and neither too broad nor too narrow.

Estimated time: One to two 50-minute class periods

Recommended Perspective models:

- The San Francisco School: “Tata” by Andrés, “My Parents” by Lucy, and “The Jump” by Jordan at <http://www.kqed.org/radio/programs/perspectives/sfschoolproject.jsp>
- Youth Radio: “Living with My Grandmother” by Leslye Salinas at <http://www.kqed.org/epArchive/R804030737>

Steps:

1. Introduction: Introduce this project by playing a couple of Perspectives and asking for student reactions. Let students know that they will have the opportunity to write their own Perspective essays and submit them to KQED. This will likely generate a buzz of ideas, questions, and general excitement.
2. Themes: I recommend narrowing down the possible themes students can write about, but keeping it broad enough so that students are writing about a subject that motivates them and that they find meaningful. Two examples of such themes are, “A change in my life,” or “What I want adults to know about being __ years old.” Tell students to keep it personal and write about something they care about and know well. This is an opportunity to also talk about the importance of taking risks with their writing, and not just picking an easy or safe topic. The Perspectives you have the class listen to should highlight a variety of risks other students or Perspectives contributors have taken.
3. Brainstorming: Using the suggested themes, students then brainstorm possible topics for their essays. After about 10 minutes, tell students to stop writing and have them narrow their list down to two options. (You can stop here if you like and have them narrow down the topics for homework.)

4. Peer interviews: Students pair up to interview one another about the two topics they are choosing between. Here are some questions to consider for the interviews:

- Describe the topic.
- Why is this important to you?
- Why do you think your audience will care about this topic?
- Is the topic narrow enough that you can go deeply into it? If not, how can you narrow it down? If it is too narrow, how can you expand the topic so that you have enough to write about?

Note: It is far more common that a student's topic is too broad or general. I like to talk about these broad topics as "watermelon" ideas. Students can then choose a specific "seed" idea to write about.

5. After these interviews, students then choose the topics they will write about. I end the lesson by having students write a "ticket out." Each student writes down his or her topic on an index card and must turn it in before leaving.