Connecting With Our Natural History

A Common Core-Aligned Lesson Plan to use in your Classroom

Author

Carly Moline, ICAA WI Fresh Start, 2014

The lesson

Students will take a trip to a local park or natural area and learn about the natural and human history, which could include how some geological formations came to be, as well as the role humans played in changing the landscape. Students will then use this knowledge to write about what they have learned using the 11 sentence paragraph or essay format (template provided). Finally, the class will use these writing pieces to choose an environmental community service project to engage in later in the year.

By doing this project, students will become more engaged in and apt to appreciate and protect our natural areas. Students will use literary and planning skills in future projects they take on in life, and will practice writing in formats that they can use in a postsecondary setting.

Students will be able to

- Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text (CCSS.ELA – Literacy.RI.5.2)
- Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts (CCSS Shift 1)
- Reading and write from grounded evidence from the text (CCSS Shift 2)
Here’s what you do

Resources Needed:
- Select a local natural history article about a region in your local area. Your State Dept. of Natural Resources, local historical societies or museums, library, local historians, local historical authors, may provide useful resources.
- For review before writing: Jane Schaffer Paragraph Template
- Essay Scoring Rubric
- Types of Writing example
- For continued environmental education, there are great lessons and projects developed in Project Wild and Project Wild Aquatic: http://www.projectwild.org/

Time:
4-5 hours (over multiple days)

Instructions:

1) **Pre-Activity/Trip Questioning:** (Discuss as a large group, or use pair share and report answers to the class):
   a) What do you know about the area we are going to? (Ex: Blue Hills)
   b) What types of things can you find in this area? (Ex: geological formations etc.)
   c) What do you expect to see today?
   d) What types of things would you like to learn more about at this natural area?

2) **Academic Vocabulary:** Pass out a copy of the text you will be working with and have students highlight any words they do not recognize in the text. Review Academic Vocabulary with the students using a word wall, or other preferred method in the classroom.

3) **Field Trip:** Students will take a trip to a local park in the area, and use the historical text obtained by the teacher (ex: “The Mystic Blue Hills” by Bob Burns) to learn about the human and geological history in their local region through a bit of lecture and exploration of the natural features of the park. Example: Students will learn more human history on the Audie Lake Recreational Area (pictured on the next page). Text can be read by students or teacher.
4) **Post-trip Questioning**: Compile student answers on the board and discuss as a group for understanding using the following questions:

   a) What do you think the author is trying to accomplish with the text?
   b) What type of writing would you consider the text we just read? Persuasive, narrative, explanatory, or maybe a combination? (Review types of writing that they have or will soon learn about.)
   c) What words or phrases in the text make you think the author is biased or trying to persuade you?
   d) What things should we consider when gathering facts from this text?

5) **Reading in Groups**: Use a cooperative learning strategy like “Jigsaw,” or another group organization technique you are comfortable with to divide students in order to help them specialize on different aspects of the text, and pull facts out of the text in preparation for their 11-Sentence Paragraph or Essay. For example, when using “The Mystic Blue Hills”, students will be split into two groups. One group will focus on the first part of the text about Audie Christianson, and the other group will focus on the second “Geological History” portion.

   Each group will underline the topic sentences and main ideas in the text, and will use highlighters to differentiate the facts in the text, and the statements that were the author’s opinion (ex. highlight facts in orange, and opinions in yellow).
Students can then use their underlined statements and highlighted text to compile a list of facts and main ideas to include in their summary. Copies can be made of these lists so that each individual student has them. Discuss as a group before moving on to ensure understanding. Their notes can be put on the board as well for more reinforcement.

6) **Use the 11 Paragraph Template:** Students will then work individually with partners, or in groups to summarize or paraphrase what they have just learned in [11-Sentence Paragraph or essay formation](#). The instructor may also use this opportunity to briefly review the essay and 11-Sentence Paragraph, and types of writing if necessary. Pass out the Jane Schaffer 11-Sentence Paragraph Template, and your preferred [essay scoring guide](#) to each student for reference. Display the template/guide on the board as well. Allow students time to complete their writing.

7) **Summary Presentation:** Each student or group will then present their summaries, and the class as a whole will then use the information they just presented to begin designing a plan for a helpful community service project in the chosen natural area. This project could be anything from building benches for scenic areas in the park, or even designing a plaque that could educate the public on more of the history of the area. Make sure that you contact your local park service in order to make sure these projects are allowed and welcome in your area, and if possible, work in conjunction with them to better serve the needs of the park/natural area.