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Overview for Pre-Writing Lesson

Years ago I realized almost all of my students blew off pre-writing. This, in turn, led to major problems as they were drafting. Without thinking through what they thought, what they knew, and how to organize a coherent whole, they got two paragraphs done and stopped, paralyzed between not knowing where to go next and not wanting to throw out two paragraphs and start anew.

I came across the Writer's Wheel in a special education journal while researching. It clearly broke down the writing process in general and pre-writing specifically. If we look at pre-writing as three distinct stages, we start to see ways to help even our most struggling writers. I have used this wheel for the last seven years with college prep, honors sophomores as well as my ELL, special education students. While it takes a willing suspension of disbelief on their part, many become converts when they see how little time the drafting takes, if they take the time to pre-write (think). Mike, a very reluctant writer, told me last month, "I thought I had trouble with writing. I write fine. I just wasn't doing the thinking."

I have included the power point, writer's wheel and a model I use to show students my process.

Opening the Mind

Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen. - John Steinbeck

Some of us have too many ideas. It makes trying to write as hard as herding cats. Some of us have too few ideas. It makes trying to write as hard as trying to find Big Foot. Which kind of writer are you – a cat herder or seeker of Big Foot? What do you do to help yourself?

Pre-Writing Worksheet

Write down 5 general topics you are interested in. Remember – you are not writing on all of these. The more you have to start with, the better it is should you change your mind. Under each jot down some areas in the general topic where there is some controversy or debate.

My turn:

BYOD, School Sports Programs, Grading Policies, 2016 Presidential Race, Newspapers

BYOD: Should students be allowed to use technology in schools?

Why do some districts prohibit BYOD?

Are there more benefits or problems for BYOD?

Is BYOD necessary for blended learning?

School Sports Programs: concussions

Should schools be more accountable for long- term damage?

Have school sports programs outlived their usefulness?

Do school sports programs create a culture that teaches athletes they are above the rules?

Grading Policies: What exactly are we grading?

Do grades truly reflect what students know?

Do policies that allow students to retake/revise assessments to prove mastery motivate or hinder student progress?

2016 Presidential Race: Candidates?

Is it time for a woman to run?

How do we keep elections reasonable- cost?

Newspapers: Have newspapers outlived their purpose?

Is print dead (newspapers, magazines, books)? Benefits/Drawbacks?

Did you notice...

- Some topics have more under them than others. While I may be interested in a general topic, I may not know enough to have an opinion or there may not be anything to worth writing on.
- Some topics had full and complete questions while others it was just a single word. For example School Sports Programs has concussions under it. This is just a marker for where I need to go.
- All of the words and questions have at least two reasonable sides to the issue. I don't have to agree with the other side. I just need to know they exist if I want a solid issue to write on.
- This is typed only because you would never be able to read my notes. This is a practice/rehearsal. As there is no audience but me, spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics are not something I care about here.

Your turn:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____
