

Storywriting on “Survival Theme

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This storywriting unit followed on the heels of reading “The Cay”, but it would work just as well for any other grade 6 novel, e.g., “Island of the Blue Dolphins”, “My Side of the Mountain”, “Incredible Journey”, etc.

The writing blocks in this unit will require booking time in the computer lab; editing sessions should take place in the classroom and/or the library (somewhere quiet for conversations).

Lesson 1 Introduction to the unit

Show a clip from the movie ‘Cast Away’, from the time the plane goes down to Tom Hanks collecting Fed-Ex parcels on the shore and opening them.

Discuss the topic of survival, creating a word bank of terms under categories, e.g., feelings, actions, setting, etc. Use the film as a starting point, then branch out to other stories of survival – in our case, we naturally chose to review these categories in terms of ‘The Cay’.

Introduce the project: each student will write and illustrate a story of survival. The setting, characters and plot are up to the student to choose, but before each free write session, we will discuss the elements of a good story, and then, after each free write, students will partner up for a buddy-edit and discussion session, followed by another draft edit by the author. Periodically, each student will meet with the teacher or the teacher-librarian for a discussion session, which will be a time for giving feedback and/or asking for advice.

Lessons 2-3 Developing the Plot

The teacher will present a lesson on brainstorming ideas for a plot, choosing an idea and developing it through to a believable conclusion.

Students will be given time to brainstorm individually, compare with a partner, and refine their individual ideas. The teacher and the teacher-librarian will circulate to offer advice or answer questions.

Students will be given individual folders for their work at the start of Lesson 2, and will be expected to have developed a rough outline of the story by the end of the third lesson and placed it in his/her folder.

Lessons 4-5 Developing the Character(s)

The teacher will present a lesson on developing characters, including appearance and background.

Students will be given time for a free write to develop one or more characters in these two blocks.

Lessons 6-7 Developing the Setting

The teacher will present a lesson on developing the setting – which one makes the most sense for the plot? A shipwreck at the South Pole isn't as believable as it is on a tropical island, for instance.

Students will have an opportunity to go online to find suitable photographs of their chosen setting, and be required to write a description of the picture using as many senses as possible.

Lessons 8-9 Writing the First Draft

Students will be given the block to develop the first draft of their stories, keeping in mind what has already been discussed about plot, characters and setting. By the end of the second block, students will have printed off hard copies of their stories and placed them in their writing folders.

NOTE: students should be sure to write "first draft" and the date at the top.

Lesson 10 Mechanics of Editing

The teacher will present a run-through of punctuation and paragraphing. Students will review their own stories and make changes in coloured pen.

Lesson 11 Reviewing the First Draft

Students will be given time to trade drafts with a buddy editor, with the instruction that the first read-through is meant only to spot big gaps in timeline or logic, or weakness in character development.

Lesson 12 Editing the First Draft

Students will use this time to reflect on their buddy editor's remarks (and those of the teacher/teacher-librarian, if she has looked at the draft) and then revise as necessary.

Lesson 13 Editing the Second Draft

Students will again trade stories with their buddy editors, read the latest version and offer constructive criticism or praise, as appropriate. Students will then re-evaluate their stories and revise as necessary. (The goal here is to eliminate illogical plot moves, and to develop the characters, as required). The teacher or teacher-librarian should be having meetings with individual students at this time, and during the next lesson to review and discuss their stories.

NOTE: students should be sure to write "second draft" and the date at the top.

Lessons 14-15 Illustrating the Story and Choosing a Title

The story should be developed to the point where the student can pick one scene in his/her story to illustrate. This could be from anywhere in the story, but the guidelines would be to (a)

choose an event that the student feels confident about illustrating and (b) have some significance to the appreciation of the story for the reader.

Students who have not yet already developed a title for their stories should do so now. They should reflect on the story overall, a climatic moment in the plot, or something to do with the character in order to create a good title.

Lessons 16-17 Final polishing of the story

This would be the time, if it hasn't already happened, for a one-to-one appointment between the student and the teacher or teacher-librarian, to