

Risky Writing

Last years' NJASK writing tasks can come in handy to help prepare students for the upcoming writing tasks on the 2014 NJASK test. Allow students the opportunity to listen to and/or read some of the anonymous writing tasks from last year. Have your students use the rubric to score several samples. Discuss and compare/contrast the scores that students have assigned to those that were assigned to the pieces by the evaluators. Be sure to expose students to all possible scorable and non-scorable responses. Discuss the characteristics that were evident in the higher scored pieces in comparison to the lower scored ones. Create a list of characteristics/techniques that should be included in a writing piece to obtain a high score. Allow students to practice responding to writing prompts while using these techniques. Then have your students score the pieces to see the strengths and weaknesses throughout the writing.

Happy Test Prep!

Bonkers for Books

Lauren Tarshis is at it again! The author of the popular *I Survived* series has just come out with two new books. *I Survived the Japanese Tsunami, 2011* tells the story of Ben as he tries to escape the monstrous wave. *I Survived the Nazi Invasion, 1944* follows Max Rosen and his sister, Zena, as they escape their Polish Ghetto. Both books are available from Scholastic. Take a journey today.

Monthly Memoir

With spring just around the corner, it's a good time to reflect on our teaching.

With so many new demands of our students and ourselves, it's easy to forget to celebrate the successes we've had thus far. Think about what is working during your literacy block and celebrate. Then, think about one area that you'd like to focus on within your classroom. Maybe you'd like to add literature circles or book groups to your class; maybe it's more writing or word study. Reach out to your reading specialist/literacy coach for help and advice.

Tipsy for Technology

Looking for an interesting way to incorporate close reading and technology? Then check out www.subtext.com. This site allows classroom groups to exchange ideas in the pages of digital texts. You can also layer in enrichment materials, assignments, and quizzes – opening up almost limitless opportunities to engage students and foster analysis and writing skills. Students can highlight, underline, copy and paste...all important skills for the upcoming PARCC assessment. Log on today and try out this site.

Working With Words

Help students improve their writing by encouraging them to use higher level vocabulary words. One way to do this is to keep a list of "good" words found during close reading. These words can be added to your word wall or students can maintain personal dictionaries. You can also have students list words from their novels. Remember, word work is more than just spelling a word; it's also about knowing what the words mean and using them correctly.



Teacher Talk

Third marking period ends on Monday, April 7, 2014.

- Grades are due at the end of the day on Tuesday, April 22, 2014 and will be published on Friday, April 25, 2014.

NJASK testing dates for the 2014 school year.

- The mornings of Monday, May 5th through Thursday, May 8th is 5th grade testing.
- The mornings of Monday, May 12th through Friday, May 16th is 4th grade testing.
- The mornings of Monday, May 12th through Thursday, May 15th is 3rd grade testing.

Collaborative Comprehension

Close Reading is an excellent strategy to use to help students prepare for the upcoming NJASK testing. Music surrounds students on an everyday basis and can help engage students in close reading. Students analyze songs to determine if the song is really about what they thought or if that idea changes after looking closely at the lyrics. Listening and looking closely at a song's lyrics can lead us to see things we may have missed before. Have students listen to a song and write down their first ideas about the music. After discussing these ideas, give your students a copy of the lyrics to read closely for text evidence. Students can use the text evidence to determine what the writer is trying to express. "After your students' realization that reading song lyrics carefully can sometimes reveal once-hidden

ideas, you might point out that popular songs, just like books – and even just like people – have messages they want to send out into the world. The more carefully we pay attention, the closer we read, the more that can be revealed."

Song Suggestions:

Disney's Frozen Soundtrack

"Over the Rainbow" and "What a Wonderful World" by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole

"Brave" by Sara Bareilles

"Roar" by Katy Perry

"Firework" by Katy Perry

Information from: *Falling in Love with Close Reading Lessons for Analyzing Texts--and Life* by Christopher Lehman & Kate Roberts