Bridging Developmental Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking Using Thematic Units

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Overview of Presentation

• Introductions
• Backwards Design and Thematic Units
• Unit: The Tethering Effects of Technology
• Unit: The Myth of the Melting Pot
• Unit: American Education: Successful System or System Failure
• Brainstorming Theme Teams
• Q and A
## Backwards Design Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify the objectives.</th>
<th>What will students know, understand and/or be able to do?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Determine what evidence will demonstrate that the objectives have been met.</td>
<td>How will you and the students know when they have been successful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan learning activities which generate learning, retention, and transference.</td>
<td>What needs to be done in the classroom to prepare students for the assessment?</td>
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Academic Literacy 052 Course Objectives

• Use pre-reading strategies to facilitate understanding of texts
• Read actively and critically, and effectively use textual annotation
• Identify and deconstruct abstract ideas found in complex academic texts
• Formulate and explain valid inferences based on information from texts
• Write and evaluate arguments for validity and credibility
• Synthesize ideas and information from multiple sources and varying points of view
• Write well-organized, unified, coherent essays with a clear, purposeful thesis statement
• Support ideas with adequate and varied evidence
• Tailor language to address a specific audience
• Detect and correct major grammatical and mechanical errors
Guiding Principles

• Thematic units are relevant to students’ lives and experiences and address affective issues where appropriate.
• Curriculum employs whole, complex readings extracted from Open Educational Resources which generate critical thinking.
• Students complete assigned readings outside of class to prepare for critical thinking activities during class.
• Instructors employ collaborative learning strategies which require students to analyze, summarize, and synthesize the ideas presented in the common thematic readings.
• Instruction capitalizes on the heterogeneous class environment.
• Multiple low-risk opportunities provide opportunities to talk, think, and write before graded, higher-stakes assessments are assigned.
Fundamentals of the Thematic Units

- Essential questions*
- Readings and supplementary materials (videos, etc.)
- Student focused critical thinking activities
- Essay prompt
Essential Questions*

• Create purpose and context
• Create connections between texts, the world, self
• Intersect with students’ experiences
• Require complex answers
• Maintain rigor
The Tethering Effects of Technology

Nancy Parker
Essential Questions:

- How has technological progress impacted our society and sense of self?
- Does technology enhance or stunt our individuality? Our humanity?
- Does technology enhance our “connectivity”? 
Essay Prompt Options:

• Has technology had more of a positive or negative impact on society?

  Think about…

  All advances in technology come with positive and negative impacts. Do you think that technological advancements have brought more harm than good? Or does the good outweigh the bad when it comes to technological advancements?

• How has technology affected human relationships?

  Think about…

  Is it helping bring people together or is it pushing people apart? Has technology lessened the “quality” of interactions between people?
Unit Resources

Textbook Readings: *Rereading America* 10th edition
- “Our Future Selves” (Schmidt and Cohen)
- “Growing Up Tethered” (Turkle)
- “Inequality: Can Social Media Resolve Social Divisions” (Boyd)
- “George Orwell...Meet Mark Zuckerberg” (Andrews)

Outside Readings:
- “The Tethered Self: Technology Reinvents Intimacy and Solitude” (Turkle)
- “Tethered to Tech and Resenting It” (Cassara)
- “Can Technology Improve the Way We Learn and Think?” (Robson)
Unit Resources

TED Talks and Video Clips:

- Sherry Turkle- “Connected, But Alone”
- Jennifer Golbeck- “Your Social Media Likes Expose More Than You Think”

Writing Resources:

- “Summarizing” https://www.powtoon.com/online-presentation/eLgHLOS77NJ/summarizing/?mode=presentation
- “Summarizing” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWKY8tPPgQQ
Recursive Reading-Writing Activities

The “Reading Recap” becomes a valuable resource for students to use during a variety of class activities:

- Group Discussions
- Summary Writing
- Journal/ Blog Assignments
- Debates
- Essay Development
Reading Recap for ____________________________

by ____________________________

Pre-Reading/Learning Foundation:

Read and Annotate the text before moving on to the next section!

Major Details:

Main Idea(s):

Questions/Responses:

(Adapted from "Front Page: Reading/ Vocabulary Worksheet" by Paula Khalaf)
Section 1:

• In order to build background knowledge, students watch the TED talk “Connected, But Alone” by Sherry Turkle and complete the first section as a pre-reading/ schema- building strategy.

• Students would then read and annotate “Growing Up Tethered” by Sherry Turkle for homework.
Sections 2, 3 and 4:

• After reading, students identify the major details from the reading in the second section.
• After reviewing their major details, students have the opportunity to evaluate their list.
  ✓ Do I have too many details/ Or not enough?
• Students then write the main idea of the selection in the third section.
• Students record their questions about the reading in the fourth section.
  ✓ What questions would you ask the author?
  ✓ What words or concepts would you like to know more about?
Writing Wrap-up for “Growing Up Tethered”

Summary Writing:

• Students spend 2-3 minutes reviewing the first section of the article, as well as, their notes from the “Reading Recap” for that section.

• Instructor demonstrates how to “chunk”/group the big ideas.
  - Using a document camera helps to demonstrate where to draw lines in the margin when grouping paragraphs.

• Class discusses the question: *Who or what is this about?*

• Students jot down or circle key words/phrases from that section.
Summary Writing (continued)

• Instructor then provides sample first sentences for the summary.
  ✓ “In Growing Up Tethered, sociologist Sherry Turkle indicates…”
  ✓ Students can use these models to plug in information for future readings.

• Groups then create the first sentence of their summary using the sentence starter and the key words from the first section.

• Students work in groups to continue this process for the remainder of the sections of the article.

• (Optional) Group summaries can then be shared in order to work on transitions, mechanics, and grammar.

(Source: Texas Toolbox: IRW, 2014)
“George Orwell…Meet Mark Zuckerberg” Jigsaw Activity

- The class is divided into 6 groups and assigned one of the Critical Reading/Writing Prompts to address after reading the article for homework.
- In class, each group becomes the “expert” on their specific prompt.
- After each group has had time to meet and discuss their prompt, larger groups are formed so that 1 member from each prompt is represented in the group.
- Each “representative” from the prompts then “teaches” the new group about the response/discussion that took place in the initial group.
- Students record notes for future use.
Critical Reading/ Writing Prompts:

1. **Identify the problem/ issue:** helps students create a “need-to-know” viewpoint.
2. **Making connections:** helps students think about course topics in relation to their own experiences.
3. **Interpretation of evidence:** helps students to read case studies, view video clips, and review information.
4. **Challenging assumptions:** helps to identify and critique assumptions while determining their source and evaluating their credibility.
5. **Making application:** helps students to use what they learned in practical ways.
6. **Taking a different point-of-view:** helps students to think about ideas different from their own

Adapted from: T. Tomasek: (Critical Reading Prompts to Promote Active Engagement with Text)
The Myth of the Melting Pot
Denise Parker
Essential Questions

• What causes prejudice?
• How does prejudice affect the victim?
• How does prejudice impact society?
• How might we overcome prejudice?
Essay Prompt

Is the idea of America as a “melting pot” a myth? Is the idea of America as a “salad bowl” more realistic? Is another metaphor more appropriate? What are the advantages and the disadvantages of each idea? Are any of these metaphors possible if prejudice exists?

The reading selections in this unit present several different perspectives on the myth of the melting pot in America. The authors experienced prejudice because of their language, social class, ethnicity, education, and race. Using these reading selections as a lens, discuss the current state of social acceptance in America. Include in the discussion suggestions on how to eliminate prejudice so everyone can have access to social equality.
Readings

• “Causes of Prejudice” (Vincent N. Parrillo)
• “Forget The “Melting Pot”: Make Mine A Salad Bowl” (Hannibal Johnson)
• “The Politics of Pidgin” (Lois Ann Yamanaka)
• “Mute in an English-Only World” (Chang Rae Lee)
• “Los Pobres” (Richard Rodriguez)
• “Just Walk on By: Black Men and Public Space” (Brent Staples)
• “The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met A Girl Named Maria” (Judith Ortiz Cofer)
• from Indian Stories “The Snow Episode” and “The Cutting Of My Long Hair” (Zitkala – Sa)
1. What were the Europeans talking about while they were coming over on the boat?
2. What are some of the people’s aspirations and dreams?
3. What will the people be doing in five years?
4. What would you title the photograph?

 Millions of people from eastern and southern Europe entered the United States through Ellis Island in New York City during a period of heavy immigration in the late 19th and early 20th century.
More recently, immigrants continue to come from all over the world. Some enter the U.S. illegally. The x-ray photo shows images of people being smuggled across Mexico’s border with Guatemala.

1. What were the Guatemalans talking about while they were in the truck?
2. What are some of the people’s aspirations and dreams?
3. What will the people be doing in five years?
4. What would you title the photograph?
Critical Perspective

• Compare the scene of the 19th-century immigrants arriving at Ellis Island with the 1999 X-ray photo taken by the Mexican authorities of human forms and cargo in a truck.
  • 1. What photograph do you find more engaging and provocative. Explain.
  • 2. What is the mood conveyed by each representation?
  • 3. If each photo is an argument, what is the thesis?
• Be prepared to discuss your responses with a partner.
“Just Walk on By: Black Men and Public Space” and “The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met A Girl Named Maria”

Students will collaborate to create a poster board focusing on Staples and Cofer’s texts.

1. In Staples (paragraphs 1-3) and Cofer (paragraph 1-3) essays, the writers describe public responses to them on the basis of race, ethnicity, and gender.
   - List the public responses to each author.
   - What specifically “prompted” each response?

2. Cofer says “Mixed cultural signals have perpetuated certain stereotypes...It is a one-dimensional view that the media have found easy to promote.” Discuss in your groups if you agree or disagree.

3. Search the web and find images to support both sides of the argument and post them on your board.

Students will do a gallery walk to look at each others’ ideas to enhance their understanding and add to their notes.
“When A Somali-American Woman Was Attacked, Support Came From An Unlikely Source”

Listen to the StoryCorps podcast and jot down ideas to the questions.
Four Corners Activity for Podcast

Read the question on the note paper. Discuss the question with your group. Decide on a thoughtful response to the question and write the response on the note paper. You should not repeat what another group has said. Be prepared to elaborate if it is needed.

• Corner 1 - Asma Jama stated, “I realized I don't belong. I have to prove myself every single day.” What does Jama need to prove? Why?

• Corner 2 - Because Asma Jama didn’t feel like she belonged, she lamented, “I had to give up a lot of who I was.” What does Jama need to “give up”?

• Corner 3 - Dawn Sahr, the woman who followed up with Jama to see how she was doing, was raised in the same house as her sister who assaulted Jama. What can account for the different perspectives on culture, language and ethnicity?

• Corner 4 - Although Jodie Bruchard-Risch served time in prison for the assault, what “rehabilitation” could have been done to ensure an appreciation for diversity?
Author’s Perspective (Review)

In preparation for the unit essay, you and your peers will review the authors’ ideas as they relate to the following quote:

“Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible.” --Maya Angelou

1. Each group will take on the persona of an author we have read and respond to Angelou’s quote. Be sure to support your response with your author’s experiences.

2. Share “your” ideas on the Essential Questions by posting them on note paper.

   What causes prejudice?
   How does prejudice affect the victim?
   How does prejudice impact society?
   How might we overcome prejudice?
American Education: Successful System or System Failure?
Haleh Azimi
Essential Questions

- Does American education policy adequately address the diversity of today’s students?
- Are there particular groups that do not benefit from the current educational system and policies?
- If opportunity is found through education, is the system meeting the needs of today’s students?
Essay Prompt

If America is the land of opportunity, and opportunity is found through education, why are we failing so many of our students? What are the factors that are causing America to fail those who strive for an education and what can be done about it?
Readings and Supplementary Resources

- “U.S. Public Education System in 90 Seconds” (video)
- “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work” by Anyon
- “American Schools are Training Kids for a World That Doesn’t Exist” by Edwards
- “States Listen as Parents Give Rampant Testing an F” by Alvarez
- “Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education” by Darling-Hammond
- “Why Poor Students Struggle” by Madden
- “Learning from the Other Achievement Gap” by Pittinsky
- “The ‘Other’ Gap” by Maxwell
- “The Writing Process” video by Amayfiel
- “Brainstorming” video by Texas A & M University
- “Basic Essay Structure” video by Smart English
- “Choosing and Using Quotations” video by Shmoop
Cultivating Critical Conversations Using Discussion Board

**Prompt:** In her article, Vicki Madden discusses barriers, “seen and unseen,” as to why low-income students fail to graduate from college. What is one “seen” barrier she mentions? How does that hold back low-income students? What is one unseen barrier? How does it also hold back low-income students?

Furthermore, Pittinsky’s article contends that although the achievement gap between Black and White students is largely publicized, the achievement gap between White and Asian students goes unnoticed, but it is significant and is not tied to parents’ income or education. What are the traits in Asian-Americans, according to Pittinsky, that may account for their academic achievement? How can this positive label of being high achievers hurt some Asian-Americans, according to the Maxwell article?

For this discussion board post, respond to the prompt in at least **200 words.** Respond to the comments of at least **two** of your classmates, as well. Each of your responses to a classmate should be at least **50 words.**
The education system in the United States is marginal at best in comparison to the rest of the world. While we are of course above some, we are not as equalized in our schooling as others may be. Money falls under the biggest issue in my personal opinion. Most every other issue either directly or indirectly falls under a money shortage. Wealthy areas have it, and poorer areas do not, plain and simple. In 1991 the money issue was brought before Congress by Taylor and Piche, stating that there is an unbalanced harm towards minorities. While minorities are of course not an immediate statement of being poor, it does seem to fall that way on average. Lack of proper funding leads to fewer and even no learning resources. This can mean not enough books or outdated books, lack of supplies, computers, and lab equipment for example. Jonathan Kozol’s "Savage Inequalities" talked about the lack of resources. There falls a lower quality curriculum as stated by the High School and Beyond Surveys, and the National Educational Longitudinal Surveys. Everything falls together in the end, and it all falls from a money standpoint. You have teachers that are not properly trained as stated by the National Commission on Teaching. They are forced to try and teach things they may not be well versed in, to an increased number of students crammed into the same classes. Then they are to use outdated materials, or no materials at all to do so. The entire system is nothing more than a joke. America doesn't even teach our students our own history properly, let alone anything else. Our educational system is nothing more than a way to teach how to pass tests and follow directions. It all falls in line with money in the end. Can you be taught to do as your told so that someone you work for can further themselves later on? If you are lucky enough to, at some point in your life, have a thought "outside the box," you just may be able to make something of yourself. The American Dream is literally just a dream to most these days, and it all starts with the way we start out in life being taught.
Peer Interactions

I am curious as to what the actual reasons would be in regards to why funding is so unbalanced? While we will maybe never actually know the truth, since it is doubtful that a person in that kind of power would ever be completely truthful. Is it that these “poor” communities are expected to abuse any extra money given? Will students drop out regardless? Would computers be stolen? Why give less just because of who is there? Makes no sense at all to me.

I agree with your points about lack of funding, schools systems should be funded equally across the board. The government should want its citizens to be as educated as possible so that they can contribute to society in a meaningful way. Students who are not properly educated today will have poor employment opportunities in the future, that can lead to the need for government assistance to cover living expenses. Society would be better if the government invested its money into education.
Socratic Seminar

**Inner Circle:** Speakers who engage in an open dialogue about the assigned readings

**Outer Circle:** Critical thinkers who engage in written dialogue responding to the conversations occurring in the inner circle
Socratic Seminar Guiding Questions

• Arise from the curiosity of the leader(s).
• Have no single “right” answer.
• Be structured to generate dialogue that leads to a clearer understanding of textual concepts.
• Require participants to make textual and personal connections/ references.
Socratic Seminar Response Rubric

Inner Circle Participants:

• 1 point: when you generate a discussion question
• 1 point: when you provide your opinion about the question being asked
• 2 points: when you provide your opinion and reference a relevant personal experience
• 3 points: when you provide your opinion and make a relevant connection to the text

Outer Circle Participants (students must respond in writing to at least 5 of the questions asked):

• 1 point: when you provide your opinion about the question being asked
• 2 points: when you provide your opinion and reference a relevant personal experience
• 3 points: when you provide your opinion and make a relevant connection to the text

A: 9-10 points
B: 7-8 points
C: 5-6 points
F: less than 5 points
Sources for Theme Ideas

• Thematic readers (*Rereading America*)
• Current or Affective topics
  • Financial literacy
  • Immigration issues
  • Advertising
• You Tube videos
• Ted Talks
• College databases (*Opposing Viewpoints*)
Tips for Creating Essential Questions

• Be Implicit, not explicit
• Span all readings in the unit
• Challenge students to think critically about the theme and related topics
• Connect to the culminating essay for the unit
• Be limited in number (at least 2 and no more than 4)
Prompt Considerations

• Essential questions
• Clear task which demonstrates reading comprehension and critical thinking
• Incorporation of multiple common texts
• Identified audience, purpose, tone
Theme Teams

In pairs, brainstorm a thematic unit and as many components as you can.

- Essential questions
- Prompt
- Readings and sources
- Activities
Email Addresses

- shayes@ccbcmd.edu
- nparker@ccbcmd.edu (Tethering Effects of Technology)
- dparker@ccbcmd.edu (The Myth of the Melting Pot)
- hazimi@ccbcmd.edu (American Education: Successful System or System Failure?)