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INCORPORATING WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS INTO SECONDARY ENGLISH
EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this teacher inquiry is to synthesize research and teacher experiences to highlight the effectiveness of writer's notebooks in secondary English classrooms. It is typical in the field of education for the use of writer's notebooks to dissipate once students enter high school; however, I aim to demonstrate the benefits that this classroom practice has for older students as well. This information is useful for all teachers, new and old, including curriculum and policy makers looking for effective classroom strategies.

To exemplify the multiple ways writer's notebooks can be incorporated into secondary English classrooms, I integrate information found in education databases, teacher blogs, and case studies to indicate where and how writer's notebooks can be beneficial to a secondary students' education, often modifying research in the elementary classroom to pertain to high schools. With this information, I have crafted curriculum that displays how writer's notebooks can be used to comply with various Pennsylvania State Education Standards and invite varying levels of thinking. I have discovered the most valuable ways to incorporate writer's notebooks into secondary English classrooms, and have based my created curriculum off of these educational benefits.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Methodology.....	16
Curriculum.....	17
Lesson #1.....	17
Lesson #2.....	21
Lesson #3.....	23
Lesson #4.....	26
Lesson #5.....	28
Lesson #6.....	30
Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography.....	34

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INTRODUCTION

As an undergraduate student at Penn State studying English and Secondary English Education, I love to read and write—but it wasn't always easy to enjoy these two activities in school. As a young girl, I would write stories and excel in the English portions of my elementary level classes; I would always overachieve on my reading logs, and my creative writing always received high praise from my teachers. Yet somewhere down the road, English classes changed. They became less imaginatively charged and much more structured and demanding. My favorite item in my backpack, my writer's notebook, seemed to be used less frequently as my days in grade school continued. I grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia and lived there all my life; my school experience never dramatically wavered since I stayed in the same district until graduation, but the change in English classes was still astonishing. Quickly, our writers notebooks that were once filled with pages practicing imagery and writing poetry were regimented practice of thesis statements and five-paragraph essays.

The writer's notebooks I remember were a tool for students to explore reading, writing, and life on the whole without being worried about whether or not entries were "correct" or "what the teacher wanted." Writer's notebooks were a place to free write about something that's been on your mind, or to reflect on a book that was just read in class. Sometimes, they were a place of practice for new writing techniques, but still an outlet for creative release, such as writing a poem practicing the use of similes, or a funny story based on personification. These books filled pages with academic growth, but were soon discarded for more "preferred" learning styles for secondary classrooms.

Without writer's notebooks, English classes became much less about growth as a reader and a writer and much more about grades, tests, and proficiency. I acknowledge that academic

changes occur as one progresses through school, but I never understood why it was so important that English classes now had a distinct “right” and “wrong.”

My experience is not unique from most students nationwide; thousands of students’ creativities are quelled as they move up in the school system, and its effects are harmful to the development of reading and writing skills. It is proven that “teaching writing as a formula reduces a complex, messy process to a step-by-step, follow-the-recipe procedure. When we teach this reductive process, we are telling students that each writing task, each writing problem, is essentially the same. No matter what the task, if students follow the recipe, the final product will satisfy all appetites, regardless of variation in the situation” (Wiley, 2000). Essentially, removing the creative process from an inherently imaginative act is harming the development of students’ literary abilities. Not only are students not receiving a well-rounded English education with this methodology, but society on the whole is suffering as the education system produces unimaginative graduates that have not tapped into their full abilities as readers, writers, and thinkers.

One of the reasons I wanted to teach English is because of its subjectivity and the ability to invite new thoughts and ideas, yet many secondary classes don’t uphold these values. I think that one way to invite creativity and open-mindedness back into English classrooms for secondary students is through the use of writer’s notebooks. While seemingly an elementary level tactic, I believe that modifications can be made in order to ensure success for students of all ages.

This concept came to me as one of my college professors passed out composition books and called them our writer’s notebooks. I thought, “*Wow, I haven’t had one of these since fifth grade.*” It was a nostalgic feeling, but the way this professor incorporated the notebooks to get

his students—pre-practicum teachers—to reflect on readings and their teaching philosophies was a really great teaching strategy, and made me want to use these tools in my own classroom, despite not being an elementary teacher. This professor made me want to embark on a mission to develop versatile curriculum for secondary English classrooms in which writer’s notebooks are at the forefront.

After my research, I have found that a consensus exists in the teaching community that writer’s notebooks increase sentence fluency, improve confidence, and provide a physical place to make thoughts concrete ideas and explore them on paper. Because of this, I want to explore how writer’s notebooks can be used throughout the entire progression of a students’ education and the benefits that would arise from their use in conjunction with literature and secondary classroom activities.

Rather than merely collect data or conduct a study, I want to represent my knowledge of writer’s notebooks, and my overall teaching proficiency, through the creation of curriculum. This way, I can directly employ my collective research and newfound familiarity of the application of writer’s notebooks into practical and useful lesson plans. My classroom activities will holistically represent the knowledge I have gathered and present a useful means that I and other teachers and make use of in our teaching practice.

My original research questions were:

1. What are the known affordances of writer’s notebooks?
2. What practical guidelines are there for teachers using writer’s notebooks in class?
3. What would skillful application of writer’s notebooks look like in a secondary English classroom?

The first question is responded to primarily through research and the use of outside sources. I reviewed scholarly journals, relevant teaching blogs, and textbooks referencing writer's notebooks in order to provide the most well-rounded answer to the benefits of writer's notebooks. Because there are so many values in many varying departments of learning, this research is lengthy but contains an array of crucial affordances to best respond to this question; these are then reflected and emphasized in my curriculum.

Similar to the first question, the second inquiry is answered through research on previously shared, published, or referenced curriculum that effectively uses writer's notebooks. Many scholarly sources, mostly published by experienced teachers, contain example lesson plans in which they successfully make use of writer's notebooks. I have compiled the advice and steps recommended to take when incorporating writer's notebooks into the classroom in order to best respond to this question and contribute to my final curriculum.

The third question is responded to through my own creation of lesson plans. I create curriculum in which writer's notebooks can be used in multiple contexts in secondary classrooms, and present a series of lessons for secondary English classrooms that feature writer's notebooks as a primary means of literacy instruction. Included in each of these lessons is a rationale for how each lesson benefits students' literary knowledge, writing skills, and intrapersonal thought. The final product is detailed activities, lesson plans, and components of unit plans that reflect my literary findings on the best use of writer's notebooks, re-designed and re-structured to best suit secondary students.

There are many aspects of writer's notebooks that can vary from classroom to classroom—how they are assessed, the amount of class time they are used for, if they are collaborative, etc—and I aim to discover which approaches work best, and have compiled these

discoveries into successful lesson plans. I do not believe that open thought and creativity should be discouraged after elementary school, but should rather be adapted through more age-appropriate activities and new methodology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the research surrounding writer's notebooks was compiled over years by expert practitioners based on successes they have had implementing writers notebook in their classrooms. Rather than study the relative merits of implementing writer's notebooks vs. other instructional strategies, my research instead compiles various effective strategies for employing writer's notebooks in the classroom, followed in each case with a rationale for why certain strategies are especially effective.

Many teaching blogs and academic scholars address the best way to introduce writer's notebooks into the classroom. Without a strong introduction and briefing, students may be left confused about future writing assignments and teacher expectations for their own writer's notebook (Ball, 2018). In fact, the blog "Two Writing Teachers" recommends waiting until later in the year to introduce writer's notebooks for a variety of benefits:

If you students bring a writer's notebook as part of their school supplies, consider collecting the notebooks on the first day of school and setting those aside. I know it is tempting to let students write in their writer's notebooks on the first day of school.

Teachers are eager for their students to begin a heart map or a list of writing territories in their notebooks. However, I recommend holding the notebooks for a day or two while you build up some excitement. Wait until your students are clamoring to get their hands on a writer's notebook. Then, wait one more day." (Murphy, 2015)

Some of the difficulty around analyzing writer's notebooks is geared towards the elementary classroom, and I am focusing on the use of writer's notebook in the secondary

classroom. While designed for elementary level English classes, Murphy's (2015) strategy of waiting to begin writer's notebook activities is appropriate for the elementary classroom, but if writers' notebooks are to be presented as a serious and legitimate activity for secondary students, it might help to start right away. While for younger students it helps build excitement and suspense, slowing down the introduction of the notebooks makes their presence and use in class be taken more seriously. This also allows students to become more comfortable in the class before beginning any writing assignments, whether they be big or small.

"Two Writing Teachers" also recommends showing mentor texts before assigning writer's notebook activities in-class or at home. Through mentor texts, "students will be able to see the possibilities a notebook can hold for them, and they need to envision what their own writer's notebook might look like" (Murphy, 2015). These mentor texts are used not just as examples, but as encouragement to mimic, contrast, relate, and inspire. The best examples are often found online, through online sources such as VanDerwater's (2019) "Sharing our Notebooks," which gives specific examples of notebook entries that might supplement the needs of diverse learners. Additionally, examples on blogs such as these often give numerous examples of highly creative and limitless use of writer's notebooks that could serve as excellent models to other students. Subsequently, Cathy Allen Simon (NCTE, n.d.) emphasizes the importance of teachers showing their own writer's notebooks to their students as mentor texts. When teachers share their own writing, they reciprocate the vulnerability that their students are showing when they share their writing with the teacher during assessment; the teacher also models that the growth of a writer does not stop after school, and can continue throughout one's lifetime. Penny Kittle, a huge figure in defining the importance of writing work in the classroom, claims that

students feel more comfortable trying new writing styles and going out of their comfort zone when the teacher models vulnerability in sharing his or her own writing as well (Kittle, n.d.).

Numerous practitioners mention the crucial need to debrief expectations and forms of assessment before beginning any classroom activities (Murphy, 2015; Simon, n.d.; Fletcher, 2001). This practice of clarifying expectations and class policies will allow writer's notebooks to be the most effective academically. In fact, methods of assessment for writer's notebooks varies greatly throughout the academic articles in the field of education; many teachers modify rubrics and timing of assessment based on the needs of their specific classes. Rather than focusing on a grade, most teachers choose methods of assessment that encourage writing and creative thought and that deemphasize evaluation and daunting rubric or points systems. Many teachers explain that students' grades will be a reflection of the effort and completion of the work, with little or no emphasis on correct use of conventions.

As students increase the depth of their reflection in their notebooks, the direct commentary from their teacher becomes crucial (Frasereta & Phillips, 2001). Rather than merely scoring a rubric, writing notes in each students' notebook during assessment is a great way to motivate students to continue writing deeply and creatively. Fracareta notes how this is often challenging, since "we could not read every writer's notebook word-for-word," (p. 106), and she advises giving as much feedback possible to students, given the constraints:

Many students told us they wanted more feedback from us. Although they valued the privacy (even having occasional folded "Do Not Read" entries), our students didn't want to be writing only for themselves in these notebooks. They wanted more than just a grade. Common requests were for more involvement from us in their writing. They were

looking for reactions to specific entries. For us the dilemma was how to satisfy these requests, knowing that we could not read every writer's notebook word-for-word."

(p.107)

Beyond assessment and grading details, setting guidelines and classroom procedures for writer's notebooks is essential before writing begins. For instance, Fracereta (2001) establishes a rule in which her students can designate certain "folded" pages, which are to remain private and not be read by the teacher. This is a great start to a series of general writer's notebook "rules" by providing enough privacy to not hinder student writing and thought, while still allowing students enough creative freedom in their entries by providing students with a space to compose entries that will not be read by the teacher. Pamela Fracareta elaborates on her experience using the "folded" page policy, stating that

We respect our students' privacy by permitting folded entries of a personal nature. These entries are never read by us, nor do they become part of the evaluation process. We want our students to realize that their writer's notebook is a safe place for all their thoughts and that they can trust us. However, we do inform our students in September that any entries not folded for privacy and which we feel indicate a serious problem will be discussed with them and referred to our counselor. Several of our students have been helped in this way." (p. 107)

Students can therefore opt whether or not to exercise or waive their right to privacy. When students express serious or reportable situations, they can receive help for any larger issues they may be having. These results demonstrate how valuable it is to encourage students to write honestly, and how positive developments can be made outside of the written page.

Ralph Fletcher (2001), a pioneer teacher and writer for writer's notebooks in the classroom, suggests also allowing students to take home their writer's notebook for more time free writing outside of class, provided that each student brings their notebook with them to class daily. Often, teachers choose to keep the books in the classroom to ensure that every student is prepared to write in class, but allowing the students time to use their notebooks at home allows for potential writing prompts for homework and less limited of a time to write. Other classroom "policies," per se, regarding the writer's notebooks can be established based on specific student and classroom needs, but should be stated directly before writing is assigned and assessed.

Beginning to use writer's notebooks in class can be a daunting task for students. Looking at mentor texts, as mentioned before, provides an outlook on the many ways to use writer's notebooks, but finding a starting point and becoming comfortable writing regularly can be a challenging task to introduce to a classroom of high school students, as Linda Rief (2003) explains:

Given a blank book with total freedom can feel overwhelming. They prefer limits, a structure, examples of previous students' responses. Over the years, I've found that a structure gives the students a sense of security and comfort so they can write more freely and honestly. And, I admit, the consistency in size and structure of the sections of the notebook help me when reading and responding to over a hundred journals every two weeks" (pp. 9)

Rief (2003) states how giving open-ended, highly creative prompts at the beginning of students' writer's notebook use is overwhelming. While creating ultimate freedom right from the start may seem like the easiest way to begin, students will thrive off of structure and limits given

in the initial stages of becoming acclimated to writing. Rief mentions above how the regulations of length and structure of notebook entries create more honesty and comfort. Teachers differ in their approaches. Cathy Allen Simon (n.d.) explains how she uses more structured writer's notebook prompts in the beginning of writer's notebook, only to then allow students to dictate their own guidelines for themselves at a later point. Regardless of how writer's notebook prompts are limited throughout the year, it is best to provide some form of regulation from the start to avoid students feeling overwhelmed or confused.

After writer's notebooks are introduced, there are endless opportunities for writing, whether these be creative, reflective, formal, or critical thinking responses. In a case study completed in 2017, three English literature professors and two high school English teachers studied the effects on identity development in secondary English students through writer's notebooks, referred to as "daybooks" in this specific study. The five researchers hoped to better understand how students develop as writers and individuals on the whole through daily writing activities. The notebooks were used consistently throughout two high schools in the Southeast of the United States: Rigby High School and Roosevelt High School, both diverse locations in which, according to state assessments, around 46% of the student body scored proficient in reading. For the purpose of the study, the teachers focused on academic, college-preparatory level students. The authors described how the journals would emphasize thinking over form and conventions:

Daybooks, then, were used as thinking tools that fostered students' reflections and research about themselves and the world around them in relation to texts. As a compilation of all musings, the notebooks were not graded for grammar, reading

comprehension, or completion. Instead, they were assessed as documents of students' reflective process of reading and writing. (p. 16)

Between the two high schools, the writer's notebooks, or "daybooks," were given the same purpose to track the effects on student performance and writing. Used in conjunction with novels as well as for self-reflection, the daybooks became a way for students to write in many forms. The authors found that "out of 240 marked entries in the 48 notebooks, 215 entries showed evidence of reflection about students' reader/writer identities (e.g., dialogue about how and why they read and write)" (p.21). They went on to identify two main categories of reflection: in the first, writers, articulated behaviors of their reader and writer identities, and in the second, writers expressed beliefs about their reader and writer identities.

An example of breaking down reading and writing identity through behavior comes from a student named Bailey in the case study:

This activity was probably my favorite because it actually made me think. When I first got the quote, I had absolutely no clue what it was trying to say and was about to just jot something down but then I read it a few more times and it finally clicked. I was really happy when I got the jist of what he was thinking and what everything in the quote symbolized. This activity taught me how to better analyze.

In this example, Bailey explored her identities as a reader by discussing how analysis had helped her think about and understand what she read. She articulated the specific behaviors that had helped her with the analysis. First, she noted that she had resisted her initial reaction to write a surface-level response because she had "no clue" about the meaning of the quote. Second, she explained that she had read the quote "a few more times," which helped her understand the text at a deeper level ("what everything in the

quote symbolized”). By articulating these behaviors, Bailey had the chance to make sense of what it meant to be a reader for her in the classroom.” (Vetter, 2017, p. 25).

Here, writer’s notebooks are providing a place for students—in this case, Bailey—to think about the processes and behaviors that make her a reader and the development of these practices. When used correctly, writer’s notebooks are a place for students to reflect on their work by tracking their mental processes in order to improve as readers and writers.

The second main form of thought tracked in this case study, expressing beliefs about identity as a reader and writer, is seen in student Kyle’s entry from the study:

This entry was about how I hope my friends will remember me when we all go to college and stuff....I used this one as a writer because I had no problem just letting it flow out. I think writing should be something that flows onto paper and connects with the person and topic. And I believe that I share that here.

For Kyle, the oral defense gave him the opportunity to discuss his beliefs about being a writer (e.g., “writing should be something that flows onto paper”). Talking about his personal beliefs about writing illustrated how this assignment had provided the occasion for him to both construct and enact his writer identities on his own terms. In addition, he had added to his storyline of what it means to be a writer (“connects with the person and topic”)” (Vetter, 2017, pg. 30).

Kyle is able to express his beliefs about writing and what writing “should” be, a crucial part of development as students become writers themselves. Acknowledging beliefs about writing on paper enables students to grow academically by processing the act of writing itself.

While this case study focuses on writer identity, there are many other researched elements for growth that stems from the use of writer's notebooks. Pamela Fracareta and Deborah Phillips (2000) studied how different students used writer's notebooks in different ways.

In the first example, a student who previously struggled with writing learned to express himself through writing. Fracareta and Phillips described a case study of a student, Josh, whom they described as having family issues at home. His entries were raw and honest, describing events at home such as his parents getting angry with him or coping with his father's poor health: "Josh had a good number of entries first and second quarter and, as he explained, found his writer's notebook valuable because it is a place to reveal his frustrations and express his anger in a non-consequential manner. It was interesting to learn that a student with limited writing skills could himself see value in writing on a daily basis" (p. 107). As a student who struggles with writing, Josh was able to write freely and express his emotions without being preoccupied with grammar rules and a point-value or grade. In a taped interview with Josh, he states, "... at my mom's when I'm feeling mad, I just go and beat on my punching bag. But when I'm feeling mad at my dad's, there's nothing to do, so I write it down" (p. 107). Fracareta and Phillips explain that despite having underdeveloped entries with frequent spelling errors, Josh's writing strength is honestly, and what he gains from writing down his raw thoughts is limitless.

They described as second study of an 8th grade student, Ellen, who had a very different background and reaped different benefits from her writer's notebook. She had a much higher proficiency in writing, and wrote specifically for an "audience," according to her teachers. The lesser emphasis on formal conventions allowed her to try out many new styles of writing in her notebook to expand her skillset as a writer, which she used the opportunity to sometimes craft

more formal writing tasks, such as drafts of essays, and to experiment with various genres and conventions:

Ellen shares many aspects of her life in a conversational, friendly tone. She values our reactions to her writings and uses our comments and suggestions to further develop her skills. Ellen's purpose for her writer's notebook is distinctly different from Josh's. By stretching her vocabulary, playing with sentence structure, trying dialogue, and working for correct punctuation, Ellen consciously uses her writer's notebook to improve her writing. She often writes drafts of essays, working carefully to express her thoughts as well as possible. (p. 108)

Because of Ellen's hard-working personality and strong writing abilities from the start, Ellen's focus for her notebook becomes a place of practice and experimentation with words and phrasing. She specifically works off of her teachers' comments, which creates a collaborative writing environment in which she is able to learn and grow from sharing her work. In contrast to Josh, who uses his notebook for emotional release and reflection, Ellen focuses more on structure and working to refine her abilities as a writer. While these affordances differ, neither one is "better" than the other; writer's notebooks provide endless opportunities for academic and personal growth that is tailored to what the student wants and needs in his or her life. Through a variety of assignments, students can achieve what they specifically design their writer's notebooks to be—whether it be a place of emotional exploration, writing drills, or anything beyond.

METHODOLOGY

The combination of this research leads me to draw conclusions and create my own lessons involving writer's notebooks. Through these scholarly journals, it is evident that writer's notebooks are beneficial in many forms, and there is no "correct" way to integrate these notebooks into a classroom. In fact, while writer's notebooks are extensively used in many classrooms, the research regarding how exactly to implement their practice is not widely published. There is therefore a need for examples of curricula that employ writer's notebook.

Because of this, I believe the best demonstration of my knowledge of writer's notebooks is through the creation of my own curriculum in which I exhibit my proficiency in using writer's notebooks as a teaching tool. Since the majority of writer's notebooks' success is displayed in lesson plans and classroom activities rather than research, I crafted my own plans in which I believe combine my research and education into successful lessons for students in secondary English classrooms. Writer's notebooks are widely accepted in the educational community as an effective tool, but their level of value stems from the craft of the curriculum in which they are being put to use. Because of this, I have written several lesson plans of my own to synthesize my knowledge from my extensive research and teaching practice to demonstrate how to best use writer's notebooks in the classroom.

CURRICULUM

INTRODUCING WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Lesson #1: Handing out Notebooks and Debriefing Classroom Expectations

Rationale/Overview:

Before writer's notebook activities begin, students should have clearly indicated expectations, policies, and assessment details laid out for them prior to any writing. Writer's notebooks, while not a complicated or unfamiliar assignment, can vary greatly from classroom to classroom and it is important to clarify how these notebooks will be used and how they will be assessed. This introduction is not used to scare students or emphasize point value, but rather ease students into the writing process and begin to open up a world of creativity and writing possibilities that they may not be familiar with. This introduction is based on the collective wisdom of many scholars in the education field, specifically (Simon, n.d.; Murphy, 2015; Fletcher, 2001) who reference how a clear, direct display of classroom policies regarding writer's notebooks is most effective, followed by structured writing prompts and mentor texts. The lesson and supplemental materials below represent this research and how it can be used in practice.

Learning target/Objective: Students will be able to understand what is expected of them in regards to their ongoing writer's notebook assignment

Standards: This lesson is a precursor to effectively address writing standards in subsequent lessons

Instruction Materials: Composition books for each student to have and keep, Writer's Notebook Policies handout

Assessment: Student understanding of this introduction will become apparent during future classes, specifically upcoming lessons regarding mentor texts and the start of their own writing process. If need be, students will have this handout that breaks down what is needed in their writer's notebooks and how they can be used, and I as the teacher will refer back to this as reminders when need be.

Lesson Outline:**Introduction to lesson/ hook/ attention grabber:**

Rather than jumping directly into the handout and distributing composition books, I want each student to take 3-5 minutes to write about (on loose-leaf, for now) a few things they like and dislike about writing, specifically in school. I will then ask them to share at their table groups, eventually opening up to a whole-class conversation about some of the shared good and bad experiences with writing in school so far. I want students to realize through this conversation that many of their frustrations can be alleviated through the use of writer's notebooks, leading into my discussion of the notebook assignment for the rest of the school year.

Body:

For the main portion of class time, I want to break down the classroom expectations and protocols regarding writer's notebooks. Many students may have used writer's notebooks previously, so this is a good time to clarify what is expected in my class specifically. I will refer largely to the handout that will be given to each student to take home and keep as a reminder of what is expected of them and what they can do with their notebooks.

Conclusion:

Students will be given a large amount of time to ask questions for any clarification. This project is very open ended, and research shows that often students can be initially overwhelmed by these types of assignments and have many questions for the teacher. I want to give plenty of time for the students to ask all of the questions that they may have. Then, I will hand out the composition books and ask students to label them with their name and class period.

Troubleshooting/Classroom Management Notes

- Absent students may need one-on-one time to break down the handout verbally to ensure that they understand the assignment fully.
- Some students may have more questions than there is class time for, and this will need to be addressed in later classes or individually outside of class time.
- Composition books will be provided by myself to ensure that every student has a notebook rather than expecting them to supply their own.

-This class period will be a lot of teacher-led lessons and my own talking, so taking breaks if necessary to maintain student engagement may be needed.

Writer's Notebooks in the Classroom

Welcome to your writer's notebook! We will be using this as a place to explore different writing opportunities throughout the rest of the school year. Please keep this book **in the classroom** so that you have it each and every day!

Your notebook is a place for you to have unlimited creative freedom and free thought. Feel free to add drawings, clip-ins of outside material, color, or anything else to supplement your thinking as a writer. This is **your space—you choose what to do with it!**

Classroom Procedures and Assessment

I will collect your writer's notebooks **at the end of each marking period**. You will receive a grade based on the thought put into each entry, and that you have **at least five entries each week**. This will be integrated into class time, and will not be any part of your homework load, since we will complete many prompts in class! Some things to keep in mind:

-Whenever you are writing and wish to keep a section private, please **fold those pages** and I will not read them.

-If you want **feedback on a piece sooner** than the end of the marking period, please leave your notebook on my desk open to that page and I will be happy to write feedback on your writing!

-If you have any questions about comments I make in your book, please ask me! I'd love to talk about your writing in person to help your improvement.

This is a place to **learn** and **grow** as writers. I will not be assigning point values to each entry or make grammatical or spelling changes. Please be conscious of putting in effort into each writing assignment or prompt, and **do not be afraid to be creative!** This is the best way to go out of your comfort zone and develop your writing skills.

Happy writing!

INTRODUCING WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Lesson #2: Introducing Mentor Texts from Other Classrooms and Teachers

Rationale/Overview:

According to research regarding the best way to introduce writer's notebooks, mentor texts are a crucial method to ease into writer's notebook activity. Students can often feel overwhelmed by a notebook full of blank pages, and it is important that they are exposed to different ways that they can fill these pages in order to fully grasp the creativity of this ongoing assignment. In this lesson, students will have the ability to glance over strong, representative work from other classrooms and teachers via blogs and websites and their own pace, writing down different styles they enjoy, whether this be about form, style, or any other added components that they admire. Through this, students can start to spark inspiration for their own notebooks.

Learning target/Objective: Students will be able to read others' writer's notebook entries and conceptualize the different approaches they can take in their own notebooks

Standards:

CC.1.3.9-10.F: Analyze how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

CC.1.3.9-10.E: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it and manipulate time create an effect

CC.1.3.11-12.C: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.

Instruction Materials: Online teaching blogs that feature different writer's notebook examples, posted in a document for students to access each link

Assessment: Students will jot down the ideas that they gather and want to try out in their writer's notebooks as their first entry, which will serve as a reminder of different things they can do if they're stuck later in the year. Assessment of this understanding will be gained by me checking in with each student as they check out these links in groups, and by sharing in whole-class discussion in the conclusion to see how effective these mentor texts were.

Lesson Outline:**Introduction to lesson/ hook/ attention grabber:**

The class will start by students' opening up to the first page in their notebook and dating it with this class's date. In the first five minutes, they will jot down any pressing ideas they have to include in their notebooks that they thought of just from the introduction given the previous day. Students will then share with their table groups and be able to write down any other good ideas they heard and want to try out.

Body:

I will pull up the list of links to mentor texts found online. As an example, I will click the first link and go to a post I find and think about the text with the class (what we like, what we can take away from this entry, anything we could try out on our own). This will show the different forms of inspiration that students can find in these mentor texts, whether it be in structure, content, design, or style. Students will then work in partners or groups to browse these links themselves and continue to add to their list of inspiration. This list can then be referred to throughout the year if they get stuck later in the year.

Conclusion:

Students will come together as a whole class to share some of their favorite mentor texts and what they want to try out. As students share, the rest of the class can finalize their list with any last ideas that they hear and like. Since each link will have many mentor texts, sharing as a whole class can allow other students to hear different ideas that they may not have seen during their online search.

Troubleshooting/Classroom Management Notes

- Since students will be reading at their own pace, some may have much shorter lists than others. Working in smaller groups is good since students are not rushed or slowed by others, but ensuring that each student is exposed to an appropriate number of mentor texts is important to take note of as I walk around and monitor the classroom
- Students may have questions about different mentor texts they find, and it is important to be available for questions during this work time

INTRODUCING WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Lesson #3: Sharing my Own Work as Mentor Texts

Rationale/Overview:

In conjunction with showing a variety of mentor texts that can be found from reliable sources online, showing my own writing as mentor texts is important in inviting students to share their writing in the classroom. Writing itself is a vulnerable activity, especially if students share personal information about their own lives. I want to be able to share that vulnerability with my students, which is depicted as an ideal practice in research (Fletcher, 2001). This will also show the upkeep and maintenance of my own writer's notebooks alongside their own, modeling how we are all still growing as writers, including those in the teacher role. Similarly, as students transition from browsing mentor texts to writing on their own, prompts should be more structured to alleviate any anxiety that may stem from more heavily open-ended prompts. In this lesson, students will have the opportunity to view snippets of my own writer's notebook and hear my own verbal explanation for my decisions—something that cannot be supplemented with many of the online texts. After, students will have a chance to mimic one of my own prompts and practice writing for the rest of the class.

Learning target/Objective: Students will be able to read my own writer's notebook entries and conceptualize the different approaches they can take in their own notebooks
-Students will be able to write in response to an example prompt and develop their own personal thoughts from an example given

Standards:

CC.1.3.11-12.D: Evaluate how an author's point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text

CC.1.4.9-10.K: Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition.

CC.1.4.9-10.N: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters

Instruction Materials: Mentor texts from my own writer's notebook

Assessment: To tie these mentor texts directly to practice, students will be asked to write about themselves using the model as a mentor text and inspiration. I will be able to read these after class to see how their writing is going from the start and to see if anything needs to be addressed in the next class.

Lesson Outline:

Introduction to lesson/ hook/ attention grabber:

I will verbally link the previous class's task of browsing mentor texts to the upcoming activity of looking at my own writer's notebook, stressing how I also keep a notebook and how I am also developing as a writer alongside them. I want this activity to be heavily stressed in importance so that it does not become redundant from the previous class.

Body:

I will project my own writer's notebook entries on the board, showing at least five examples of various length and organization. Because I am the writer and I want to emphasize the writing process, I can comment on my thought process and make explicit the various decisions I am making (i.e what I plan to edit later). I can also strategically show types of entries that may not have been available in the previous class in online resources. After each one is discussed, I will let students turn talk at their tables about what they think and jot down any ideas to their entry from yesterday.

Conclusion:

The last example I show of my own writing will become the prompt for the students to write on; this prompt was a prose entry about my career choice and development as a professional.

Students will be asked to write at least five lines about their own career goals and where they want to be professionally in the future, either in the same format I chose or in their own. Ideally, there will be about 15-20 minutes left of class time for students to write. I will explicitly state that the students should be writing for the entire time provided in order to increase sentence fluency and to stimulate thought. They will keep their composition books in the room at the end of class, and I will be able to read them to check for understanding or if anything needs to be addressed in the next class.

Troubleshooting/Classroom Management Notes

-Since this class is based more in whole-class work with a few times to talk in table groups, I will need to pay extra attention to the conversations in small groups to see if students are confused or where clarification is needed. When students leave a page blank, I need to determine whether they are having trouble thinking of things to write, or whether they have ideas but lack the means to express them, or whether they are opting out, which in this context is inappropriate and unacceptable behavior.

-Because the students are instructed to write the entire time, if a student isn't moving their pen, I should be alerted that classroom writing policies may need clarification or the student may need one-on-one assistance (finding out if the student is struggling with thinking or writing).

-I will need to make sure each of my examples are scanned and projected so that each student can read from their seat since they will not be using their laptops to view it individually

-Students may be experiencing writer's block for their first writers notebook assignment, so I should be readily available to help where needed.

THE VERSATILITY OF WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS IN THE ELA CLASSROOM

Lesson #4: Using Notebooks as an Tool for Discussion

Rationale/Overview:

Writer's notebooks can be used as an introduction activity to lead into small-group or whole-class discussions. As a class embarks on a new unit or concept, having notebooks as a way to brainstorm ideas prior to jumping into class activity can allow for students to properly formulate their ideas in order to better participate. Not only can this be used for new concepts, but it can also allow for students to recall information from the prior class period in order to be best prepared for that day's classwork. In this lesson, students will write in their notebooks for the first five minutes of class about their thoughts about the nightly reading for homework (in this case, chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby*); students can individually choose to write down questions, emotional responses, or analyses of specific events or characters. This will allow for each student to state their individual thoughts to best prepare for further discussion, while also practicing writing.

Learning target/Objective: Students will be able to process and write down their initial reactions to the reading homework (chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby*).

-Students will be able to add, modify, and advance their initial ideas and thoughts through discussion with peers.

Standards:

CC.1.2.9-10.A: Apply appropriate strategies to analyze, interpret, and evaluate how an author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

CC.1.4.9-10.A: Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately

Instruction Materials: Writer's notebooks, class novel

Assessment: I will be able to circulate the room and see how students are doing in terms of their initial reflection in their notebooks; I will also have access to these entries prior to class in order

to assess completion of prior homework and level of thinking. As students move to discussion, I will circulate the room to overhear conversations and assess how students are handling material collectively.

Lesson Outline:**Introduction to lesson/ hook/ attention grabber:**

I will ask students to all get their writer's notebooks and a pen; the writer's notebook will serve as today's introduction/hook. Students will have 10 minutes to jot down their ideas from the homework—in this example case, chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby*. I will clearly instruct that all levels of thinking are welcome: questions, observations, emotional reactions, and analyses. I will circulate the room as students write.

Body:

Using these written responses in their notebooks, students will form small groups of 4-5 students each to discuss what they have written. In this time, students can add to their ideas from their peers' contributions, either in their notebook or mentally. Each group will discuss for 15-20 minutes and be asked to share 2-3 ideas they discussed with the entire class.

Conclusion:

Each group will share a couple of key ideas with the whole class. As the teacher, I will connect these ideas to key points in the novel and/or push their thinking to make comparisons or connections where needed. Each student can continue to add to their ideas from the intro activity in their notebook.

Troubleshooting/Classroom Management Notes:

-Each student will have varying levels of thinking in their notebook; for example, some students may be asking questions or stating literary observations, while another may be making more advanced comparisons to other points in the novel or analyses of the significance of events or characters. I will need to aid in small-group discussion when needed in order to allow for all levels of thinking to be heard and understood.

-Some students may have not completed the reading homework or have read carefully enough to enter a thoughtful response in his or her notebook. I should pay attention to when a student seems to be writing little to nothing and ask if they need assistance in order to clarify or help motivate.

THE VERSATILITY OF WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS IN THE ELA CLASSROOM

Lesson #5: Using Writer's Notebooks as a Reflective Activity

Rationale/Overview:

In contrast to Lesson #4, writer's notebooks can also be used as a conclusion to a class when used as a reflective activity. Rather than beginning thoughts and ideas, writer's notebooks are also a good place to summarize concepts learned in class to demonstrate understanding of the lesson. In this lesson, I will also be using the instruction of chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby* as an example, but this time exemplifying how writer's notebooks can come to use as an 'exit ticket.' For this lesson, I will read chapter 5 with the class and discuss key plot points as we read, allowing them to summarize their ideas in their writer's notebooks following this lesson. With this, students will be able to continually practice writing skills while also reflecting on their reading and class time.

Learning target/Objective: Students will be able to write and reflect on chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby* in their writer's notebooks.

Standards:

CC.1.4.11-12.S: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.

CC.1.3.11-12.C: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama

Instruction Materials: writer's notebooks, whole-class novel

Assessment: With reflections/'exit tickets' in the students' writer's notebooks, I will be able to assess student understanding of the lesson by reading their entries prior to class. From this formative assessment, I will be able to address any lingering questions in the next class.

Lesson Outline:

Introduction to lesson/ hook/ attention grabber:

While the majority of the class time will be taken up reading chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby* as a class, I will begin the lesson by verbally reminding students what we discussed in chapter 4 in order for them to recall past information. This introduction will be brief in order to read and discuss as much as possible, but important nonetheless to get students to recall prior information.

Body:

As a class, we will read chapter 5 of the novel, stopping to discuss where necessary. Students can use their writer's notebooks to jot down key ideas if they prefer to do so. This will take up the large majority of the class period in order to complete the entirety of the chapter while also stopping to discuss key events, characters, and/or symbols.

Conclusion:

Here is where the writer's notebooks will be used; students will open their notebooks and have 10 minutes to jot down a reflection on the reading completed in class time. I will state clearly that all levels of thinking are welcomed—anything from questions, emotional reactions, comparisons, and more. I will share that this reflection is a formative assessment of how they are understanding and interacting with the novel thus far. After 10 minutes have passed and students have completed their thoughts, they are free to go on putting back their writer's notebook as an 'exit ticket.'

Troubleshooting/Classroom Management Notes:

- As a reflection activity, each student will have different lengths of written responses and varying depths of thinking; it is important that I distinguish between variation in student ability level and any confusion or lack of participation. I can do this by observing classroom behavior and aiding students who are more hesitant to interact with the novel or writing exercises.
- Students who are not writing or reflecting may be confused, or maybe be at a loss of thought. I will check in with them individually to help clear up any misunderstandings or incomplete ideas they are having.

WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS AND CREATIVE CONTENT

Lesson #6: Using Writer's Notebooks to Practice New Writing Techniques

Rationale/Overview:

Writer's notebooks are most often thought of as creative tools, mostly due to the vast topics students can choose to write about to fill their blank pages. In an English classroom, specifically secondary English classes, practicing new creative writing techniques is a crucial way to expand a students' skillset in terms of writing both creatively and professionally. The majority of research surrounding the creative benefits of writer's notebooks stem from the elementary classroom, but there are many ways to modify this studied curriculum in order for older students to find creative value; this can be done by modifying lessons to introduce more advanced writing techniques to supplement creative content. In this lesson, students will be asked to write a short story using an epistolary structure. After introducing epistolary and reading example texts, in small groups, students will brainstorm characters, a minimum of two, that will be communicating through letters and essential plot points. The rest of class time will be used to allow students to write. As this is a larger, more complex assignment, this will be the first lesson of several that give students time to practice this technique in their notebooks.

Learning target/Objective: Students will be able to identify epistolary structure in writing.

-Students will be able to write using epistolary style in their own short stories.

Standards:

CC.1.4.9-10.B: Write with a sharp distinct focus identifying topic, task, and audience.

CC.1.4.9-10.E: Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition. • Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic. • Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms of the discipline in which they are writing.

Instruction Materials: Epistolary writing samples, writer's notebooks

Assessment: I will assess understanding during the debrief of epistolary structure, and then be able to check in with students individually in their small groups during their brainstorm to confirm comprehension of the task at hand. As a multiple-day assignment, I will also be able to read their work following class time to ensure productivity and understanding from each student.

Lesson Outline:**Introduction to lesson/ hook/ attention grabber:**

As a whole class, I will define the epistolary style and show examples. Students will use this time to take notes and begin to think about how they can use this approach in their own writing. This will also be a time to answer any clarifying questions before beginning the writing process.

Body:

Once students understand what epistolary style looks like, they will form groups of 3-4 students each in order to brainstorm story ideas that can follow this style; this is way to generate creative ideas as a group and spark inspiration from others'. They can discuss characters, setting, plot points, etc until each individual student feels confident to start practicing this skill in their writer's notebooks individually.

Conclusion:

Moving directly from small groups, students will use the rest of class time to practice using the epistolary style in their writer's notebooks. Since writing a short story is a longer assignment, more class time will be used to continue writing and editing these stories in their notebooks in future lessons.

Troubleshooting/Classroom Management Notes

- Students may struggle with understanding and using this style of writing on their own; I will walk around during small group discussion to ensure that all students are on-topic and comprehending the assignment
- Creative work can be challenging for some students who are not the most imaginative individuals. Small group brainstorming can help these students out, as well as individual assistance during writing time from myself.

CONCLUSION

Research and curriculum combined, my work demonstrates how writer's notebooks can be effectively incorporated into the secondary English classroom. Through my own educational journey and field experience, I became extremely interested in creative opportunities for older students, and could not help but wonder why these activities, or tasks with similar goals and outcomes, are used solely for younger ages. Students in both elementary and secondary schools can benefit from class time that provokes creative, unhindered writing processes in regards to both reflection and content creation. High school students are too often limited to a five paragraph essay structure, thesis statements, and formal analyses. Based on my research, writer's notebooks are a great classroom tool to modify for secondary students in order to encourage regular writing and open thought. The technique of using a writer's notebook in the classroom is quite broad; these notebooks can be used in conjunction with novels, to practice new methods, or to generate content-based creative stories at any point in a typical lesson. By modifying research and scholarly blogs based in the elementary classroom, writer's notebooks can be an effective tool in nearly every aspect of the secondary classroom as well.

My crafted curriculum is by no means an all-encompassing representation of how writer's notebooks can be incorporated into high school English classes. Rather, my aim is to exhibit the multitude of approaches an educator can take when using writer's notebooks. While merely six lesson plans, my curriculum can be expanded, modified, and added to in many ways; that is what makes writer's notebooks so versatile. Each lesson plan is merely a demonstration of what can be done in the classroom to make writer's notebooks effective and to target more

creative and reflective activities, and as I continue my journey as an educator, I plan to add to this as well.

As an upcoming graduate, my career as an educator is just beginning; nevertheless, I hold my teaching philosophy close to my heart and aim to give as many reflective, creative, open writing assignments as possible to each of my students for them to grow as writers and thinkers. The power of writer's notebooks in the classroom is endless, as demonstrated by my research and curriculum, and I am eager to harness this in a classroom of my own.

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