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Reading, writing and voice [9th grade]

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Trinity University

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Education Department

Understanding by Design Curriculum Units

Trinity University

Year 2006

Reading, writing and voice

Faith Fugit
Trinity University,

UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

Unit Cover Page

Unit Title: Reading, Writing, and Having Voice

Grade Level: 9th grade

Subject/Topic Area(s): literary voice, social change

Designed By: Faith Fugit

Time Frame: 6 weeks, A/B block scheduling

School District (One Designer): Houston Independent School District

School: Houston Academy of International Studies

School Email: jfugit@houstonisd.org

Brief Summary of Unit (Including curricular context and unit goals):

The Houston Academy of International Studies is a public charter school that opened in HISD in fall 2006. As the freshman English teacher for HAIS, I wrote this unit during summer 2006, before many rules, routines and procedures for the school were hammered down. This unit is planned for the fall semester and aims to help students explore the concepts of literary and social voice while using their own voices authentically to shape our new school.

As an opportunity to exercise voice, students participate in a semester-long school-improvement project for HAIS. Throughout our study of literary and social voice, students keep a journal of their experiences at our new school, then turn those experiences into realistic ideas for change and improvement of their high school. They are assessed by their use of communication methods covered in class, like advertising, letter writing, journalism and public speaking. The goal of the assessment is to give students a legitimate opportunity for change and provide them with the skills they need to enact that change. While our school situation is unique because we are brand new, this assessment can adapt to a longer-established school environment.

The topics of this unit—social change, civil disobedience, and individual voice—make for extremely flexible text choices. I plan to read Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* during this unit, but I did not integrate the reading with these lessons yet. I offer examples and suggestions for other texts, but teachers should feel free to substitute them with any of the myriad texts available on the subject of social justice and change or containing unique voice like Cisneros'.

Unit: Reading, Writing, and Having Voice

Grade: 9

Stage 1: Desired Results

Understandings

Students will understand that...

Every person has a unique voice that is capable of causing change in the world.

Your voice is valuable and not to be wasted, but learning how to use it appropriately is even more valuable.

Not everything in the world is as it seems: media, politics, and interpersonal relationships all bring unique problems to the idea of authentic “voice.”

Essential Questions

Knowledge & Skill

How do you know if a voice is authentic or sincere?

What responsibilities come with the use of your voice? How do you use it appropriately in different situations?

What is your voice and where does it come from?

(NEISD scope & sequence; TEKS; Core; etc.)

(1) Writing/purposes. The student writes in a variety of forms, including business, personal, literary, and persuasive texts, for various audiences and purposes. The student is expected to:

(A) write in a variety of forms using effective word choice, structure, and sentence forms with emphasis on organizing logical arguments with clearly related definitions, theses, and evidence; write persuasively; write to report and describe; and write poems, plays, and stories;

(B) write in a voice and style appropriate to audience and purpose; and

(C) organize ideas in writing to ensure coherence, logical progression, and support for ideas.

(2) Writing/writing processes. The student uses recursive writing processes when appropriate. The student is expected to:

(A) use prewriting strategies to generate ideas, develop voice, and plan;

(B) develop drafts, alone and collaboratively, by organizing and reorganizing content and by refining style to suit occasion, audience, and purpose;

(C) proofread writing for appropriateness of organization, content, style, and conventions;

(D) refine selected pieces frequently to publish for general and specific audiences; and

(E) use technology for aspects of creating, revising, editing, and publishing.

(4) Writing/inquiry/research. The student uses writing as a tool for learning. The student is expected to:

(A) use writing to formulate questions, refine topics, and clarify ideas;

(B) use writing to discover, organize, and support what is known and what needs to be learned about a topic;

(C) compile information from primary and secondary sources in systematic ways using available technology;

(F) compile written ideas and representations into reports, summaries, or other formats and draw conclusions; and

(G) analyze strategies that writers in different

fields use to compose.

(7) Reading/comprehension. The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to:

(A) establish a purpose for reading such as to discover, interpret, and enjoy;

(B) draw upon his/her own background to provide connection to texts;

(8) Reading/variety of texts. The student reads extensively and intensively for different purposes in varied sources, including world literature. The student is expected to:

(B) read in such varied sources as diaries, journals, textbooks, maps, newspapers, letters, speeches, memoranda, electronic texts, and other media;

(C) read world literature, including classic and contemporary works; and

(D) interpret the possible influences of the historical context on a literary work.

(11) Reading/literary concepts. The student analyzes literary elements for their contributions to meaning in literary texts. The student is expected to:

(H) understand literary forms and terms such as author, drama, biography, autobiography, myth, tall tale, dialogue, tragedy and comedy, structure in poetry, epic, ballad, protagonist, antagonist, paradox, analogy, dialect, and comic relief as appropriate to the selections being read.

(12) Reading/analysis/evaluation. The student reads critically to evaluate texts. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze characteristics of text, including its structure, word choices, and intended audience;

(B) evaluate the credibility of information sources and determine the writer's motives;

(C) analyze text to evaluate the logical argument and to determine the mode of reasoning used such as induction and deduction; and

(D) analyze texts such as editorials, documentaries, and advertisements for bias and use of common persuasive techniques.

(20) Viewing/representing/analysis. The student analyzes and critiques the significance of visual representations. The student is expected to:

(A) investigate the source of a media presentation or production such as who made it and why it was made;

(B) deconstruct media to get the main idea of the message's content;

(C) evaluate and critique the persuasive techniques of media messages such as glittering generalities, logical fallacies, and symbols;

(D) recognize how visual and sound techniques or design convey messages in media such as special effects, editing, camera angles, reaction shots, sequencing, and music;

(E) recognize genres such as nightly news, newsmagazines, and documentaries and identify the unique properties of each; and

(F) compare, contrast, and critique various media coverage of the same event such as in newspapers, television, and on the Internet.

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task:

Throughout this semester, you'll be exposed to examples of protest, civil disobedience, and many methods of persuading others through words and writing. We'll talk about advertising, the communication methods of politics, and the power of speeches and the written word in affecting change.

You'll also be thinking a lot about change in your own world this semester. We're a new school, so there are infinite things we could add to or change about the way things run. Over the next four years our rules could change, new district or state regulations could pass, and we could come into many new and amazing opportunities. But in order to expand and enrich our school, we need visionaries and mouthpieces for change. We need your ideas.

Throughout the semester you'll be keeping a journal to document your experience at HAIS. Sometimes I'll give you required prompts for this journal, but you also have the freedom to write in it when you please, using it as a personal journal for your life. Near the end of the semester, we'll look back at these journals for times when you were dissatisfied with the school, had an idea of something fun that you'd love to have at the school, or noticed the absence of something important. You'll use these moments as starting points for your end-of-semester project.

Your job is to change something at our school. All semester you'll learn about bringing out your individual voice and using it appropriately, and finally you'll get to really put it to work. Whether you want to add a program at our school, remove a policy in the district, or change a national issue that affects our lives at school, you'll have to use the tools you learned this semester to approach the problem. Based on examples from history, what's the appropriate method for making this change happen? Fiction? A column in the newspaper? Posters on the bus? A letter to your representative? A presentation to the school board? These are just a few of the infinite choices you have to approach your problem.

While my hope is that you'll use this as a real opportunity to change your school for the better—not just an opportunity for a grade—you can use the attached rubric to understand how you will be graded. You don't have to use one specific type of communication, but you have to know which type is the MOST effective in your situation. You don't have to use a specific style of writing, but you have to use the style that is MOST appropriate for your audience. You'll rely on examples from class to get ideas for how to approach it.

To help me know which information you used from class in your project, you'll also be writing a 2-3 page reflective essay. This essay should recount your decision-making process for your school change goals, explain why you chose the methods you chose, and reflect on the challenges and successes you had in making the change happen. Think about questions like, "What was difficult about this? Why was it so difficult? What were obstacles to getting my voice heard? Does this have any larger implications for historical social change, like the examples we've talked about in English and World History class?" See the other attached rubric for guidelines for the reflective essay.

Good luck and think big.

Other evidence:

(quizzes, tests, academic prompts, etc.)

note – these are usually included where appropriate in Stage 3 as well)

- Students will reflect on their developing voice and individual story in their journals
- Students will role-play and experiment with uses of different voices in appropriate and inappropriate contexts, evaluating the results
- Students will take on the voices of different authors to play with using different voices
- Students will analyze speechwriters' use of different conventions and tools
- Students will research a powerful or influential figure and outline the long-term effectiveness of the skills they used
- Students will research and identify the corporations that produce the majority of the media they consume
- Students will create advertisements to explore the process of selling and marketing to a key audience

Stage 3: Learning Activities

(Steps taken to get students to answer Stage 1 questions and complete performance task)

Throughout Unit: Students will be keeping a journal daily in class, and prompts will concentrate on students' experiences as freshmen and as members of our new high school. They will also focus on identifying their own stylistic voice and telling their personal story. Students will also be participating in daily Silent Sustained Reading as a school-wide initiative to encourage reading of choice. Classes will have daily vocabulary word studies and vocabulary quizzes every two weeks, as well as continuous work on reading strategies, study skills, and grammar. Not all homework assignments for the unit are listed in these daily blurbs.

Day 1: What is stylistic voice? Define voice using contrasting examples from music, poetry, and popular authors. Students will all keep our definition and notes about voice in their binders, and we'll post an official definition of voice on the wall: "hearing a writer's personality through their words." Today's objective is to solidly define literary voice and eliminate any misconceptions. Later we will talk about having "a voice" in social change, so this first definition should be understood as separate from that idea.

Day 2: What types of voice are you familiar with/do you like? Which authors are your favorite and why? We'll examine reader's responses to different "sounding" authors. This class will link with the Silent Sustained Reading we've been doing all year and students will learn about "genre" and explore which genres typically contain different types of voice. What authors are exceptions to their genre or have a truly unique voice? Students will choose one of their favorite authors from our class library and describe that author's voice with as many adjectives as possible. Students will complete a journal assignment writing in the voice of their chosen authors.

Day 3: Today students will dig into the different "voices" one writer can have in different contexts. We'll compare fiction and essay that were written by the same author, for example Anne Lamott. We'll examine how the author's voice interacts with and informs the voices of fictional characters. We'll also talk more about genre and awareness of audience. We'll look at examples of inappropriate or ill-fitting uses of voice and see how awkward or ineffective voice can be when misused

Day 4: How do you know what your “voice” sounds like and how do you write with it? How do you sound authentic? How do you write sincerely without being cheesy? How do you know when it’s appropriate to use different types of voice? Why do people imply about you based on the way you speak or act? These are the big questions for the day, and we’ll use role-playing and a lot of writing to try on some different voices and personas. Students should be approaching a beginning understanding of their own personal story and individual voice, which they’ll need for the final assessment.

Day 5: Continue to explore the use of different types of voice in different contexts. Explore connotative vs. denotative language and practice through writing.

Day 6: Read and analyze famous uses of voice. Students will read famous speeches as examples of using the spoken word to enact change. We’ll study Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, Gandhi and others to understand their tools of expression and persuasion. In contrast, students will read examples of infamous speeches by figures like Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini to evaluate their quality and contemplate the effects of their message. Repetition, parallelism, and other speechwriting devices will be a focus of our evaluation of the speeches.

Day 7: We’ll continue our study of the written word as a method for change by considering fiction and poetry. We’ll sample writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Walt Whitman, the Beat writers, and WWI poets as examples of people who used popular culture to express their messages. Music, movies, and visual art are other methods of popular influence, and we’ll talk about contemporary artists who try to influence public opinion, especially in the youth culture.

Day 8: Today we’ll look at written non-fiction written for a social purpose. We’ll talk about Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense” and other pamphlets, manifestos, and expository journalistic writing. We’ll compare this writing to the fiction from last class—what’s more effective? Is it more useful to tell a reader what to think or to show them? What situations might work best for each?

Day 9: Students will learn how to create the types of communication used in the business and professional world, like letters, petitions, and formal complaints. We’ll talk about the power (or lack of power) that each of these methods has and determine what situations call for each. Students will also learn and practice finding out who to direct these items to: if you want something to change at a business or school, who’s the best person to send a letter or petition to? Who has power in organizations, and how do you find out who they are?

Day 10: When do you know when you should speak out about something? How do you know? Is there a quantifiable way to decide it? Which method of using your voice is the best for different situations? Review all the different ones we’ve talked about. Throughout the last 5 days, we’ve put up examples around the room or on a bulletin board. If you were the famous people we’ve talked about, would you use a different method, in retrospect? Who were the most successful? Which methods seem to be the most influential? For homework, do a study of a person you think is incredibly influential and outline how they gained their influence. Was this person successful in the long term or short term? Was it a positive or negative influence on the world? What is your evidence? Are their methods still relevant or effective today? Why or why not?

Day 11: We’ve talked about the ways people use their voices to enact social change and make things “better.” The next five days will talk about ways people use these skills for things other than creating the perfect world. Not necessarily evil stuff, but not idealistic, either. This section

is about how to decode others' voices in real life, daily situations, like advertisements, conversations with salespeople, and when watching TV. The first day of it is about political talk. We'll watch clips from *Wag the Dog* and *The War Room* to examine both a satire and a documentary representation of the world of political spin. Students will debate and consider how to determine if a politician is being sincere and talk about the ways a person can evaluate a message by researching it independently. We'll also do an overview of the types of communication a politician has to do: press conferences (thinking on feet), speeches (largely written by another person—professional writer), and advertising (mudslinging vs. positivity, cliché politician image). We'll also talk about the team of people who create the image of a famous person or politician, emphasizing that you should take their outer images with a grain of salt.

Day 12: The news. We'll dissect newspapers and kids will learn what to expect from different parts of the paper—it's not all supposed to be the same, and each section has a different style, voice, and purpose. Students will take apart the paper and determine this information inductively. They'll also create a mini-paper about our school to determine their knowledge of the different sections' purposes and ability to code-switch in different writing styles. We'll briefly start talking about the tree of corporate ownership to prep for next time—their homework is to list their three favorite movies, bands, books, magazines, and TV shows and find out which of the major corporate giants owns each for next time.

Day 13: *Merchants of Cool* and advertising day. We'll talk about why companies exist (to make money) and what they'll do to get your money. Our discussion will spring from the PBS Frontline documentary *Merchants of Cool*; we'll talk about the materialism that abounds in American—especially American youth—culture and question whether a person's "style" is really their own. What are the implications of knowing how heavily we're advertised to? Does it mean we shouldn't buy things and wear cute clothes? Does it mean it's hopeless and we should all give in to the capitalist behemoth? We'll finish by talking about how the things a person owns and the media they enjoy reflect or don't reflect on their literary and individual voice. For example, based on a writer's style, could you infer what TV shows they watch and what their favorite movies are? Is this problematic, or ok?

Day 14: Advertising continued. We'll examine the different approaches to advertising (flattery, luxury, body image, status, necessity). Kids will practice creating these advertisements and reflect on the process. After making an advertisement, does it make you feel less trusting of the ones that are targeted toward you? Also, how do you know when you need an item? How do you know if it's actually good? What are some ways advertisers trick you? We'll finally round out our study of advertising by digging into the ethical issues: is this an "every man for himself" world where manipulative advertising is legitimate? Is it the government's job to regulate advertising and marketing? Is it an individual's job? Could businesses survive if they did things a different way? Where do we go from here?

Day 15: Debrief and talk about big project. What did we learn about persuasion and how different people in the world try to persuade us? How can we trust anyone, knowing all this stuff? Do we have a reason to be honest and sincere, knowing that a lot of people/companies aren't? Do politics/advertising have to be this way? Imagine if they were wildly different—would it work?

Possible texts for in-class examples and enrichment:

- Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and speeches
- Coretta Scott King's *Montgomery Bus Boycott*
- Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street*
- Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden*
- Malcolm X's autobiography
- Well-known or famous speeches by almost anyone
- Youth fiction for varied examples of voice
- The poetry of Langston Hughes, Allen Ginsberg, and other writers with distinct, memorable voice
- Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*
- The prose of Ernest Hemingway for examples of distinctive voice
- Ansel Adams' photography of nature and Manzanar internment camp
- Socially conscious music of the 20th century, like rock of the 60s and rap in the 80s
- Clips from movies by socially conscious directors and writers, especially movies that have impacted the popular consciousness about different issues

| Standard | Below Expectations (F) | Approaching Expectations (C) | Meets Expectations (B) | Exceeds Expectations(A) |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Choice of methods to achieve goal | Student appeared to choose methods randomly or without good reason; methods of persuasion are poorly fit to the student's goals. | Student chose some methods for persuasion that fit the problem, but some choices were not effective; student did some, but not much, research into plan. | Student approached improvement of HAIS using well-researched and appropriate routes; student chose methods of persuasion that were a good fit for the desired goal. | Student masterfully researched the problem and discovered an excellent and effective route for change; student's work actually results in a lasting change. |
| Quality of persuasive argument | Student's work contains few or no significant arguments for change or does not back reasons up with evidence or explanations; student does not utilize the elements of persuasive speech covered in class or uses them inappropriately; voice and style do not match the method of communication used. | Student's work contains some arguments for change or at least draws attention to real problems to be changed; student uses some elements of persuasive speech from class, but sometimes strays from what we learned; voice and style of writing/speaking are somewhat matched to the method of communication used. | Student's work contains arguments for change that are backed up by multiple reasons and examples; student utilizes elements of persuasive speech that were covered in class; student correctly matches voice and style of writing/speaking to the method of communication they use. | Student's work is overwhelmingly persuasive; arguments are almost flawlessly logical and reasonable; student provides innovative and truly realistic solutions to problems; use of voice and communication are professional and incredibly skillful. |
| Presentation | Work was not revised or edited; work has a last-minute quality; work contains many errors that distract the reader; physical qualities of the final product are inappropriate or mismatched for the intended audience. | Work is somewhat revised and edited; work contains some errors that distract the reader; physical qualities of the final product are somewhat appropriate for the intended audience, but not ideal. | Work is revised and edited; work is virtually error-free; physical qualities of the final product are appropriate for the intended audience. | Work is artfully revised and edited, making it a pleasure to read; physical qualities of the final product enhance its reception by the audience; presentation appears professional and expert. |
| Word choice | Student does not effectively use connotative and denotative words; student uses a caliber of language | Student usually uses connotative and denotative words effectively and is usually at the right caliber of | Student uses connotative and denotative words at appropriate times; student uses a caliber of language that fits the | Student's choice of language is descriptive, persuasive, and extremely effective; student has a mastery of |

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|------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| | that is too high or too low for the intended audience; language is offensive. | language for the audience. | intended audience and venue; language is appropriate for a school setting. | the language used in the writing. |
| Plausibility of goals | Student sets goals that are either very low and easy or much too large; goals reflect hasty decision making and little research; student does not consider possible side effects of plan. | Student's goals are sometimes realistic and are of some interest to the student; goals may be lower than student is capable of or not fully thought out, but can be used. | Student sets goals for persuasion and school change that are high but possible; student takes the project seriously and sets goals that are worthwhile and realistic. | Student sets goals that are extremely ambitious and creates a detailed plan for achieving them; goals are huge but student makes them achievable; student researches goals thoroughly to understand their implications and considers possibly side effects. |
| Use of voice | Work is plagiarized; work is formulaic or cliché; student resists sincerity and personal engagement by using a persona or excessive sarcasm; student's individual voice is not present in the work. | Moments of authenticity and sincerity are present, but the work does not have the feel of total engagement; work appears to be hurried and not carefully crafted to include author's personality. | Student's work is authentic and sincere; student is guided by genuine personal interest or passion; student's engagement in the cause is evident through personal written voice. | Student's work is undoubtedly his or her own; work is spilling over with personality and individual style; student's voice positively contributes to the effectiveness of the argument. |