

6 SOURCE FILE

VARIATIONS ON THE BOOK REPORT

Teachers develop their own repertoires of favorite teaching activities. Here we have collected a sample of practices for the teaching of writing that have worked well for us and for our classes. Prospective users would evaluate these ideas in terms of their own teaching styles, the nature of their classes, and their own instructional goals. They would need to fit the specific practices into their own process approaches to writing.

We have included written variations on the book report, some favorite composition activities, samples of editing and response forms, journal starters, and sentence-framing patterns.

Variations on the Book Report

The written book report has long been a stock-in-trade for the secondary school English teacher as a way to assess and credit the important independent reading that students do. Here we'd like to suggest some alternatives to the plot summaries and critical essays that have dominated the book report "genre."

The Reading Diary

Using the format of the learning log, students comment at the end of each reading session on both the substance of their reading and its effects upon them. Students will be learning how to make incisive summary comments, to respond to more than plot in a book, and to monitor their own reactions as readers.

Letter

When students finish their books, they are asked to create letters from the world of the story. They develop verisimilitude by designing a personalized letterhead that fits the story, they adopt the voice of a major character in the story, they aim at a specified audience (either some other character in the story, a character in another story, or the letter-

writer him- or herself as an old friend), and they use the letter to rationalize or explain some set of actions in which the character was involved.

For example, for the reader of *Great Expectations*, Pip writes a letter to his old friend, the student, in which he describes his feelings about Magwitch at several points in the book and justifies those feelings. If he's feeling any guilt, for example, he would be willing to share that feeling with an old friend.

Super Book Report

The super book report asks the students to undertake several different written activities relative to their reading of the book. Since it's complex and difficult, this kind of report might be saved for late in the school year, when it could serve as a culmination to instruction in literature and writing. The activities could include such items as the following:

As a *fact-finder*, fill in a questionnaire that asks for basic bibliographic data, a short character sketch of a major character, several one-sentence theme statements, an identification of point of view, and a one-paragraph description of the climactic event, all items of solid literary content.

As a *salesperson*, prepare a four-minute audio- or videotaped sales presentation for the book, aimed at bookstore buyers. Do the presentation from notes; turn in the notes and the tape.

As a *psychologist*, do a character analysis of one of the main characters in the book, trying to figure out what makes the character tick. Identify and comment on character qualities, using specific examples of behavior.

As a *historian*, prepare a graphic time line of the ten most important events in the book. Keep the line to scale. Use both pictorial and verbal material.

As a *film director*, select one scene from the book and prepare a written plan for how you'd film it. Include details of setting, action, and casting, and a sample of the dialogue.

As a hard-to-please *critic*, write the three-hundred-word review your editor requested, praising where appropriate but being critical as well. Be specific and use some quoted material from the book.

(Implementation comments: The teacher's demonstrating each of these activities would give students something specific to aim for. Brainstorming or clustering would be important prewriting activities to insist on with several of these.)

News Format

A book with much action could be appropriately reported in a news format—a radio or television news script or a newspaper front page. The featured items could include write-ups of events, personalities, opinions, or predictions from the book. Recent coverage in local media could guide the students, and teaching about the various kinds of media presentations might also be necessary.

Interview

Student writers can also produce interviews (student with main character, main character with author, or student with author, for example). The presentation of each interview should include an introduction about the accomplishments, ideas, and background of the interviewee. It should also include a dialogue based on a series of questions posed by the interviewer to bring out the important features of the book. Each of these two activities needs a full prewriting exploration, and in revision the writer needs to attend to the natural sound of the dialogue. The interview could be set in a talk-show format.

Trial

The student writer can assume the role of prosecutor or defense attorney representing the book in a case involving one of the following propositions:

This book should replace _____ as a required work in English.

_____ should be removed from the class library.

_____ should be placed on the all-time favorite book list for teenagers.

The presentation could be the attorney's closing argument. If both sides were presented, the class could act as jury. This assignment requires argumentative writing; the clear assumption of a role, an audience, and a purpose; and a good understanding of the book.

Advertising Campaign

Students are asked to design advertising campaigns to promote the sale of their books. The campaign is to include the following elements:

- a graphic poster
- a thirty-second TV spot (consider script and visuals)
- a magazine ad (four by eight inches)
- a personal appearance by the author at a department store (provide a script for a three-minute book talk)

Students will need samples of all of these items to use as models.

Interior Monologue, Diary, Journal

The students assume the role of a character and write an interior monologue, diary, or journal. An interior monologue will be in present tense, written as the character moves through the event and recording what the character is thinking as events happen to him or her. A journal or diary will be written generally in past tense as the character reflects upon the events at a later time.

For example, after reading "Love of Life," by Jack London, students may prepare the journal (with ten entries) that the man might have written as he struggled to find food and to live. Ask the students to imagine that the journal was carried in his pocket all the while so it will look authentic when it is turned in. Imagine the students' delight (and their parents' wonder) when they insist on burning, tearing, or putting mud on their assignment!

Progress Reports

Have students prepare a series of progress reports. These might be written by the student or a person outside the world of the story as he or she reflects on the progress and development of a character. For example, the story "Charles," by Shirley Jackson, provides an excellent opportunity for students to write progress reports on the activities of Laurie

(Charles). Use the format of your school's progress report form.

Game Board

Prepare a game board or sheet similar to the one shown. Students may choose one or more activities to complete, or they may roll dice or use a spinner as a way to select their assignments.

1. Create a greeting card that one character might send to another. Tell why it would be sent and the receiver's reaction.	2. Make a drawing of an object from the book which you think would be a symbol of one of the characters. Tell why you chose this object and how it is a symbol in the story.	3. The main character is to receive an award at a ceremony. Design the award and tell why the person is to receive it.
6. Choose a scene from your book and rewrite it as if it took place two hundred years in the past or two hundred years in the future.	5. Choose a scene from your book and rewrite it as if it took place in one of these locations: a. on a desert island b. in Antarctica c. on an ocean liner d. in a city you know well	4. You are a millionaire suffering from a fatal illness. You are trying to decide what to do with your money. Tell which character you would leave your money to and why.
7. You are a newspaper reporter covering an event as if you witnessed it.	8. You are a private detective assigned to follow the main character. Write a report on his or her activities for one period of time. Tell where he or she went, who he or she saw, and what he or she did.	9. You are a psychologist offering advice to the main character in your book. Tell what the problem is and what advice you would give.
		10. You are a fortune-teller. Predict the future for the main character. Give details of where he or she will be and with whom, and what will happen.

Postcard

Students are to prepare a picture postcard and write a message from a principal character in the book addressed to themselves. The postcard is to include the following features:

1. A color illustration of a scene from the story on one side of the card
2. The student's name and address as the addressee
3. A stamp designed to be appropriate to the world of the story
4. A postmark (cancellation) with the date and place appropriate to the world of the story
5. The author and title (underlined) of the book printed vertically between the message and address spaces
6. A brief sentence or phrase at the top of the message area which describes the scene

7. A message addressed to the student conveying something important from the story
8. The signature of the character from whom the message comes

A suggested evaluation of the postcard assignment can be found among the sample editing and response forms in this chapter. Below is an example of the message side of the postcard.

Book Cards

Students may be required to prepare book cards for a certain number of books read each quarter. Tell them they should not write a card for a book they did not like, nor are they necessarily expected to write a book card for each book they read. Prepare a wall poster with the book card format to be used for the quarter. The format will remain basically the same for each quarter, but the information required will vary. Cards should be collected every

A Typical Venutian Summer Day

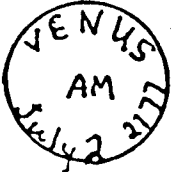
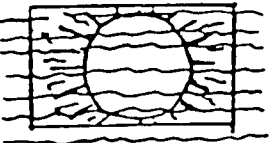
Dear Uncle Ralph,

I want to come back to Earth where the sun shines most of the time. I am so sick of rain, Rain, RAIN, RAIN! Every day, day after day, it rains.

We had sunshine for a little while yesterday, the first time in seven years. But I missed it.

Please ask my folks to let me come live with you for a while - please!

Love,
Margo

Ralph Smith
023 Corolla Dr.
Sunnyside, CA
93217
Earth

Bradbury, Ray "All Summer in A Day"

three weeks or so, not all at the end of the quarter marking period.

All cards may be filed in alphabetical order by title in a file box and will give ideas to students who are searching for something to read. They can look up what other students had to say about a book. This will encourage students to talk about books with one another.

Below are samples of forms which may be used:

BOOK CARD Form A

Title _____ Name _____

Author _____ Date _____

Number of pages _____ Rating given _____
(Super, OK, etc.)

Use complete sentences:

1. Tell when and where the action in the book takes place.
2. Tell what is the strongest or weakest part of the book.

Form B

1. Briefly tell what the book is about.
2. Name a person (living or dead) you would recommend read this book and tell why you chose this person.

Form C

1. Tell something worthwhile you learned from reading this book.
2. What did the main character(s) value? Give an example.

Form D

1. List the main characters and tell a bit about each one.
2. Record your personal reaction to the book.

Form E

1. Did the main character(s) change from the beginning to the end of the book? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Complete this sentence: I found this book to be _____ (adj.) and _____ (adj.) because _____. (You may not use "interesting" or "exciting." Check the thesaurus or dictionary for other descriptive words.)

Form F

1. List three important facts or events in your book.
2. Tell whom you would cast (from TV or the movies) to play the major roles in the book.

Thematic Report Form

A sample book report form on the theme of "the outsider" follows. It contains specific instructions for writing the report and for the critique that would follow. This form, with a few adaptations, could effectively work for reporting on reading related to other themes, such as courage, adventure, conflict, the search for identity, etc.

Book Report: "The Outsider"

On a separate sheet of paper, prepare a report on a book you have read that tells of someone who might be considered an "outsider." Follow these instructions:

1. Write your name, date, and class period on the right-hand side of the paper at the top.
2. Write the title of the book, the author, and the number of pages on the upper left-hand side.
3. Consider in a minimum of four paragraphs the following questions. Be explicit and detailed.
 - a. Who is the outsider in this book? Tell something about the character and personality of the outsider.
 - b. Why is he or she an outsider? What were the circumstances that caused him or her to become an outsider? What are his or her emotions about the situation?

- c. Does the outsider become reconciled or content to be an outsider or do circumstances change? If so, how? What, then, are his or her emotions?
 - d. Include a brief selection from the book (it does not have to be a direct quotation of someone speaking) which explores the feeling of being an outsider.
4. This report should be one to two pages long. Your first draft will be shared in editing groups and is due _____. Announcement of the due date of the final copy in ink or typed will be made at the time of editing. The final report will be evaluated using the critique sheet below.

Critique Sheet

	Possible Points
1. Name, date, and period on right side of paper	5
2. Title, author, and number of pages on left side	5
3. At least four paragraphs, properly indented	5
4. Sufficient information on:	
a. who the outsider is	10
b. why that person is an outsider and the circumstances	10
c. whether circumstances change and how	10
d. selection from book exploring feelings of outsider	10
5. Spelling, punctuation, grammar, legibility, and overall appearance	20
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	75

Favorite Composition Activities

Included here are some favorite composition projects which did not fit elsewhere in this handbook. Notice that they tend to involve most of the steps in the writing process and that they generally require students to assume some kind of stance toward their material.

Place Poem

Students in an American studies class, during their study of geography, are asked to pick a favorite familiar place, one about which they feel strongly. Using a Whitman excerpt from *Leaves of Grass*

about New York City as a model, the students identify physical detail, climate, and human activity as the content elements, and free, unrhymed lines with a refrain at the end as poetic elements. They are asked to cluster to the three content elements by thinking in detail about their places, then to write a rough draft poem of fourteen or more lines. After the teacher demonstrates critiquing this kind of writing by discussing a rough draft he or she has prepared with the whole class, small groups critique one another's poems, looking for their match with the model, for concrete detail, and for personal involvement with the place. Final drafts are prepared in ink or typed, and then illustrated for presentation in a class anthology.

A Crystal Moment

This creative-writing exercise, by Linda Preston, of the Area 3 Writing Project, involves first reading with the class and discussing the Robert P. Tristram Coffin poem, "Crystal Moment." Have students brainstorm about their own crystal moments, when some experience came together for them in some powerful insight or meaning of glory and beauty. The teacher then might share a crystal moment of his or her own, going into some detail about the experience itself and specifically stating the insight gained.

Each student then selects one from his or her discoveries, does a clustering for the details of the experience, and prepares a draft. Revision could then follow partner critiques focusing on the quantity and quality of details and the wording chosen to present them. "Crystal Moments" make an excellent public display in a school library or some other heavy-traffic area at school. Even a community display might be sought. Writers retain the privilege of not displaying their pieces if their moments are too intimate for exposure.

Crystal Moment

Once or twice this side of death
Things can make one hold his breath.
From my boyhood I remember
A crystal moment of September.
A wooded island rang with the sounds
Of church bells in the throats of hounds.
A buck leaped out and took the tide
With jewels flowing past each side.
With his high head like a tree
He swam within a yard of me.