

## **Writing for an Authentic Audience: A Mindset Shift**

### **Brainstorm Writing Assignments:**

#### **Overview**

Designing writing assignments where students write to an authentic audience can motivate students to do their best work, reinforce the idea that writing style depends on audience, give a practical reason to revise and edit work, allow students to share their ideas with others and give them a sense of pride when sharing their work. It can change a students' mindset from writing to achieve a grade to writing to achieve a goal.

#### **Benefits of writing to achieve a goal and not a grade include:**

- Can provide intrinsic motivation for students.
- Can inspire students to take pride in their work.
- Reinforces that writing style should depend on the audience.
- Provides a practical reason to revise and edit work.
- Allows students to share ideas with others.

#### **Key Ideas:**

- An authentic audience can be anyone that a student is writing for other than their teacher for the purpose of getting a grade.
- Anything written for an audience should go through a revision process before sharing. The time spent revising and the number of drafts created would vary based on the purpose and audience.
- After completing the writing assignment the work can be shared in any format. It could be turned into a podcast, movie, cartoon, email, etc. The format should be logical when considering the audience. A cartoon would likely not be appropriate to send to congressman to share an opinion on an issue and a research paper would not be the best format to teach a first grader about the content you are learning. Sometimes it is appropriate to assign a specific format and other times it could be part of the assignment for students to choose the best format for sharing with their audience.
- The students should share their writing with the intended audience. One real world lesson from this could be that an intended audience may not always respond and that is ok.
- If a writing prompt or assignment is for a "fake" audience or that is only for the teacher to read, consider how that type of writing is used in the real world and who would read it. Who do mathematicians write for, what do they write? Who do scientist write for and what do they write? In the real world why do people write fiction and who do they write for? Who uses writing to persuade, to inform, to describe in the real world? How do they do it? Who do they do it for?

### **Getting Started**

1. Begin with a learning goal. Is it content, writing style or both?
2. Consider how that type of writing is used in the real world. Why do authors write fiction? Why do historians, scientist, mathematicians, artist, etc. write in the real world and who is their audience?
3. Choose a topic that is both interesting to the students and can connect to the real world.
4. Provide students opportunities to read mentor texts before beginning the assignment. Ask them to consider how they will use the model to impact their writing.

### **Restructured Assignments Examples:**

1. Research paper was change to become letter to someone in the community, government organization or an open letter.
2. Classic novel rewritten as a children's story was change to become be rewritten as a digital book to share with lower school students and/or published online.
3. Reflection about current event was changed to be a letter to the editor.
4. Essay about what makes a good leader changed to a presentation to their peers about what leadership qualities they should look for when voting for student council representatives.

**Brainstorm:** How can you restructure some current writing assignments so that they are written for an authentic audience?

## **Implementation Ideas**

**Teaching or Sharing Information with Younger Students** -For many topics students can write the content in a way that would help a younger student understand it at their level. The complexity and format would depend on the target audience. A high school student could create a podcast to share with a middle school student, a middle school student could create a cartoon for a lower school student and a JK student could use a series of pictures to share an idea with 2/3 year old. The key is that they actually have the opportunity to share their work with a target audience.

**Writing to Inform Others**- Students can choose a topic/issue they are interested in or think would be helpful for others to know more about and then write to inform others about the topic/issue. This could be a situation where they are using the information provided during class or where they need to go out and research more information. They could be writing for their peers, a company, their congressman, their parents, etc. They could also write an open letter that could be published online. They would then share their writing in the format that is most logical for their audience.

**Writing to Share an Opinion** -Students have many opinions and love to share them. Provide a writing opportunity where they are able to share their opinions with others. There are many authentic audiences for opinions. One is a book review. Students can write book reviews for their classmates or to post online. If students are all reading different books an authentic audience would be their classmates and they could post them on online, share with the class verbally or post in the classroom. Students could also share their book reviews online to a larger audience. It is important that students use evidence to support their opinion. Focus on a current event with multiple sides to the issues and provide an opportunity for students to share their opinions supported with facts to someone who can bring change. It may take a little research to figure out who their audience should be but that would be a great learning experience in itself.

**Script** -Students can write a script for other students to perform. The script could be a way to act out an historical event, show a scientific process and/or theory, explain what happened in a story, make a prediction, demonstrate understanding of an event, etc.

**Instructions** -Students can write out instructions for their peers or younger students. This could work especially well if there are multiple activities that students need to do within the class. Students could be divided into small groups and each group would be responsible for figuring out how to do something and writing instructions to teach their peers.

For example, in math students can write out step by step instructions for how to solve a problem for the next class to use.

**Song** -Write a song that someone will sing for an audience.

## **Follow Up**

Write a note or email to a colleague that explains some of the benefits of writing for an authentic audience and explain an idea you came up with to implement it in your curriculum.

