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A Genre Study on the Reflective Essay

There's a key that can unlock creative, imaginative, meaningful, and fluid writing in your students. It isn't learning how to spell everything flawlessly. No matter how many times my teacher instructed me how to spell "definitely" and "beautiful" with red ink soaking through my papers I never got it right, and it never helped me become a better writer. I am lucky my spell check application assisted me in the writing of this genre study because I still manage to get those two words wrong. The key isn't hidden in the complexities of grammar and mechanics. Something tells me that no matter how many centuries we study grammar there will always be mistakes. While these skills are important to learn, seeking perfection out of students in these areas will never unlock truly meaningful and empowering writing. The key lies in teaching students genre.

What is a genre?

Generally speaking, it's a type or category of text (Cooper, 24). We all have our favorites: novels, non-fiction, poetry and so forth. Even these genres have genres: romance, memoir, and lyric. A genre *does* something. In *Evaluating Writing*, Charles Cooper refers to studies that say genres share some basic characteristics, such as being "social, communal, situational, functional, structured, and stable" (25).

Social: Genres relate to a particular organization in society.

Communal: Genres are shared and discussed between the people who read them.

Situational: Certain genres work best in certain situations, such as a news article working best for relaying the news.

Functional: Genres do something; they accomplish a task.

Structured: Genres parts are arranged in a unique way.

Stable: Genres are unchanging, although there can be sub-genres involved.

Chances are that students have a good idea about genre already when they come into your classroom. They know that by looking in the newspaper they can gather information about what's happening that particular day in the world, and that they wouldn't look in one of their favorite novels for that type of information. Your students may also know that they are a fan of rap music, but not country music, because of the style of each and

content of their lyrics. When their favorite television show comes on, they know that there will be a theme song at the beginning introducing the show. They know this, but not necessarily because they have a sophisticated understanding of genre, but because it's just the way it is. This is a good thing and Lucy Calkins, author of *The Art of Teaching Writing* and an expert on genre studies, says we should tap into this knowledge (357), explore it, and expand it. When your students learn what is valuable about a particular genre it becomes a vessel for writing about what is meaningful in their lives—and they can put it in an email, a journal, a song, a letter, a poem, a novel, and so on. Your students probably won't write very many meaningful things if they are given a Regent's essay to practice every day in class. Allowing your students to explore genre allows them to practice meaningful writing in a variety of ways, allows your students to develop their writing skills organically, and allows your students translate to any state test, I promise.

Why do a genre study?

In the teaching of writing, the form is more important than the topic. What you assign your students to write *about* is pretty meaningless if they do not learn what they're writing *in*. It's difficult for you, if not impossible, to choose a topic that will inspire every student sitting in the classroom. However, if you are able to effectively teach your students *how* to write about a topic that inspires your students through a specific genre, then your students have just been given a tool that is useful for the rest of their lives. A topic doesn't make a particular text great. If that were true, *Oliver Twist* would be just as good as a case study on impoverished children in nineteenth-century England. The genre of novel gives this text a form in which to flourish. In *The Art of Teaching Writing*, Lucy Calkins says: "If the focus is always on the topic—the country or the dinosaur—when will children inquire about line breaks, meter, and repetition in poetry, or about developing a character and staging a story?" (357) You should awaken in your student the ability to express literate imagination. Randy Bomer says that the most basic tool for doing this is by teaching genre (116). The question for you now is "which genre is right for my class?" There are many to choose from but one in particular, the reflective essay, is excellent for developing transferable skills and promoting self-knowledge.

Why do a genre study on the reflective essay?

Reflective essays have been popular in Western society since Montaigne wrote *Essais* in 1575 (talk about being *stable*). This is because a good reflective essay is effective, moving, and important to society. Reflective essays "have enabled writers to explore ideas, usually suggested by specific occasions" (Cooper, 36). Occasions such as being at war, finding God, or becoming a parent (just to name a few) have all been reflected on in essays and compiled into books. *Death and Bereavement Around the World* is a collection of reflective essays put together by John Morgan and Laungani Pittu about how people deal with and what they learned from death of people close to them. Another good example is *What Have You Changed Your Mind About?* edited by John Brockman which contains essays about people coming to new realizations about a variety of experiences and how they grew from their experiences. This genre of writing is relevant and interesting—why would it ever go out of style? There is never a shortage of material in literature or society to reflect on. Montaigne was well respected and he published

Essais in a paper bound pamphlet centuries ago, but in today's digital world we are all able to publish our reflections in the form of a blog with an audience of literally everybody in the world. That sort of power can entice your students into writing some pretty incredible reflective essays with the proper guidance.

Reflective essays are your students "thoughts about a particular subject and more specifically what your students have learned from it" ("Reflective Essay, *Private Writing*"). Reflective essays open up a different but special kind of thinking that should be fostered in the learning environment: thinking that causes them to go back, evaluate, assess, and learn from what happened. It's a deeper thinking than merely making observations. Reflective essays are not necessarily your standard step-by-step, five paragraph thesis-centered argument. Reflective essays require the student to "try out ideas, turning them one way and then the other through contradictions, contrasts, analogies, allusions, and other strategies while maintaining a thematic coherence"(Cooper 37). For your students, some basic essay structure can help guide them stay organized, which this genre study provides. The reflective essay practice is a method for stretching student creativity to make new meaning of experience.

Another way of looking at the value of this genre study is its relevance towards an ELA exam. Your students need to be able to reflect on things they read, hear, and see in essay form for these tests. Teaching a genre study on reflective essays will develop the skills necessary for succeeding on state tests. Surely this is not the ultimate reward for writing a good reflective essay, but it satisfies certain requirements students need to succeed in our school systems. The real value comes through the process and goals of writing a reflective essay. So, here's how to do one.

How to do a Genre Study on Reflective Essays

It's a good thing that cavemen invented the wheel because I don't think I would have been able to figure that one out had I been living in a cave, surviving on mammoth meat. Another invention (not quite as important historically, but nearly as profound) that I don't have to worry about reinventing is the seven-part plan for putting together a genre study, devised by Charles Cooper. His plan will be a foundation for this genre study on reflective essays. Cooper will supply the bread to hold this study together, and my information will provide the meat. This section will outline how a genre study on reflective essays fits into his seven steps, which are listing basic features, reading models, choosing topics, inventing and researching, planning, reflecting, and assembling a portfolio. I will also include a section on publishing, which is an important addition to Cooper's process.

Listing Basic Features

What a reflective essay *is*

To begin, make clear to students what reflection is: "our ability...to learn from our experiences" ("Guide Reflective Essay"). A reflective essay is talking about what we learned from our experience, or trying to make sense of a particular experience. It could be anything from something we read, to a trip we took sometime in our past. The

reflective essay promotes better learning. This style of writing includes things you've learned after a personal experience. The experience can be something read, learned, observed, or felt, but it must go deeper. Reflective essays are *personal*. Learning really consists of two parts: experience and reflection. Reflection is what you take away from and remember for next time, and it's making sense of what you've gone through in order to truly understand what happened to you. The reflective essay "connects feelings, emotions, thoughts and attitudes" ("Reflective Essay") which are connected with that experience. Your students should be able to write about a big life experience, but can also write about something as simple and ordinary as their daily commute, as long as similar outcomes of growth and knowledge arise from it. Reflective essays are useful after a learning experience such as a class project or workshop as a sort of evaluation of whether or not that worked and sums up what you learned. Walt Whitman said that he saw the world in a blade of summer grass. Knowing this, I suppose it's possible to reflect intelligently on any topic.

Reflective essays keep track of progress and growth, or lack thereof. Writers of reflective essays look backward at themselves before an experience or process and then ask themselves inwardly, "How did I improve in this area? What did I accomplish? Why did this experience resonate with me in particular? Why did I choose this topic to reflect on?" ("Steps For Writing a Reflective Essay"). These questions are meant to give the essay meaning and relevance to your students writing, which is what you want to see in their writing.

What a reflective essay *is not*

Reflective essays are not told from another's perspective. They are not fiction. They are true, personal accounts of lessons learned. The reflective essay is not an account of what happened, a chronicle of events, a reaction, or a response. Nor is it a confessional. While it is personal, it is not merely a platform for bearing your mistakes and regrets. It's important to make this distinction. Students will sometimes just look back on a bad experience and not show how they learned from it or grew. It can be a good thing to write about regret, but the process of reflection shows growth moving on.

Reading Models

Introducing models is an important next step. How can a student know how to write a reflective essay without having seen one first? It would be like teaching art students to paint an impressionist painting without having the art students see one first. You could go through all the steps and theories behind it, but nothing beats seeing the real thing to truly know what it means to paint an impressionist painting. It would be good to show published examples a student example (Cooper, 47), as well as other mediums of reflective essays such as audio/visual examples. So first show your students an example essay from a great source for reflective essays called *This I Believe*. In Appendix A, I supply a website that contains many examples of these essays. Pick one out you think your students will really connect with, copy it, and have a volunteer read it out loud. Discuss what it is about. Have your students write in their writer's notebooks their initial reactions to the essay. Check for their level of understanding and talk about why this

essay is important and what makes this an example of good reflection. These *TIB* essays are a great way to get students thinking about reflecting on their experiences. These essays were formerly radio broadcasts in the 1950's but have been recently brought back into popular culture and put into a book by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman. From these *TIB* essays, many have been produced as podcasts that are provided on National Public Radio's website, *NPR.org*. This site gives students short, meaningful examples of reflective writing. You can allow your students to listen to several examples on their own on this website and choose one to examine for a homework assignment that analyzes an essay (Roth). Listening to these podcasts is merely to inform students of the form that reflective essays can take. Listening to these podcasts can make students feel more comfortable when they go to choose a topic to write about on their own. Listening to these essays also teaches the student transferability from the written form that requires them to read to the broadcast form that requires them to listen. They will be learning about the essay in a multimodal way that will also be an important skill to practice for state tests. Listed in Appendix A is also a homework assignment that asks the student to briefly analyze the essay and examine audience, which will transfer to the writing of their own essays.

Another example of reflection that could be included is "Wear Sunscreen" by Mary Schmich of the [Chicago Tribune](#), which is included in Appendix B. Distribute this to your students to have them read it. It's a famous essay written in 1997 that offers excellent wisdom and advice. This is a piece that reflects on all of the lessons learned throughout her life, no lesson more important than to "wear sunscreen," although Schmich hints at life's greater lessons throughout the essay. The essay has been adapted into a speech, which has been read at commencement ceremonies. You can then show this to your students because it's an interesting hook for this study before you introduce the elements of a reflective essay. This video is an excellent example of what students could do as a culminating project ("Baz Luhrmann - Everybody's Free [To Wear Sunscreen]"). This video has taken the essay and turned it into a multimodal experience. You can have your students take their finished essay and turn it into something like the video to be shown to classmates, friends, and family (more about this project in the publishing section of this study). Let your students know that this level of accomplishment may not be what you expect from them, obviously. Some of your students may be intimidated by seeing the *TIB* and *Wear Sunscreen* examples first, and understandably so. The models show your students how effective great reflective essays can be and hopefully inspire good writing. Each of your students is capable of achieving success on this level.

There are some really great models of reflective essays found on [edge.org](#). Here, there are essays that have been included in the book *What Have You Changed Your Mind About?* There are numerous contributors with very insightful essays reflecting on what they've learned and ideas they've held dear to them. The writers then show the reader how they have changed their mind on the subject and how they've grown from it. You can begin with one of these as a "touchstone text." Some of the essays may be beyond some of your student's comprehension, however, there are some that will work well. Use "Try the Experiment Yourself" by W. Daniel Hillis, a Physicist and a writer. It is a short, but good

example of the elements of a reflective essay. Another essay you could use is “A Big Mind Change At Age 10: Vacuums Don't Suck!” by Alan Kay, a computer scientist and a writer. Kay’s essay tells about his experience learning something new as a child and how it changed him. You can find Hillis’ and Kay’s in Appendix C.

Also show your students a good student example and have students write down their initial reactions to it. There is a reflective essay listed in Appendix D of a college student’s reflection on his high school education. There is also listed a guiding question on this sample to see if your students are getting the elements of the reflective essay. This is a good one to show because it lets students know that a reflection comes from their experiences, and an experience they all have in common is their education. They don’t have to write about their education but this is a good place to look first. The student is responding to an experience of his, which is an element of reflective writing. Talk with the students about the reflective essays you show them and begin to go over what elements make a reflective essay.

At this point, allow your students to respond to the models. As Randy Bomer says, “it is important that [you] open up a space for [the students] to respond to these texts as readers, as human beings able to be affected by literature” (Bomer, 126). Have the students read along with “Try the Experiment Yourself” by Hillis first and initially just have the students write some initial reactions to the essay on a piece of paper. Then read another essay, “A Big Mind Change At Age 10: Vacuums Don't Suck!” by Kay and have the students react again. Students can then work in groups to analyze the techniques and strategies Hillis uses in this piece. Students should gather characteristics common in each essay to come up with a comprehensive list. Once that it is completed, the students can share what they found in the essays while you compile a list on the board for the students, adding in crucial elements. Make sure that your list includes these features:

Reflective essays:

1. Show a personal experience
2. Shows what was learned/how you grew or did not grow
3. Connects feelings, emotions, thoughts and attitudes
4. Looks backward
5. Looks forwards
6. Looks inward
7. States why you write on the topic
8. Shows what was accomplished or not accomplished
9. Reacts/responds to experience

This is an important step in pre-writing. A more thoroughly compiled list can be found in Appendix E and should be distributed to the students for their reference. This list will establish their genre knowledge that will better prepare the student going into the writing of their reflective essays. Looking at the models and then synthesizing this list will illustrate the essence of what a reflective essay really is to your student. Cooper believes that making the process more heuristic enables better comprehension of the genre (Cooper, 48).

Choosing a Topic

A touchstone of any writer is his writer's notebook. This is an especially important tool for the writers of reflective essays. A writer's notebook is something the student should carry always, or have easy access to, in order to write down initial reactions to something that happened or notes things that have happened that the writer wants to remember. Make this a part of the students resources for this genre study early on. Have the students make observations in the writer's notebook that could prove useful for later reflection. Have them also write down ideas for topics. Students may not have a whole lot of experience reflecting on their experiences--the life of a young person is often just lived in fast-forward. As stated before, an important part of learning is reflecting on things that we've done. Students should have guidance on the topic they choose, however. Remember, a diversity of topics should be a natural part of a genre study. Teachers aren't there so much to assign topics, but to teach students how to write about any topic in a particular genre. A reflective essay can have numerous topics, so the important factor in getting students to write a reflective essay is pointing them in the right direction.

Use prompts to help students choose a topic for their essays. For example, there is a list of prompts listed in Appendix F. Sample essays can be used as prompts for what to write about as well, such as the many examples listed in *This I Believe*. The essays found in *This I Believe* involve issues that would motivate a lot of your students to reflect on that draw from personal experience. There are essays from authors that range from reflecting on their place in the world, to reflecting on their thoughts on tragedies, and even essays that reflect on how they deal with and view the pizza delivery guy. Sometimes students need help remembering things that they have experienced and these prompts can lead them to reach into their memories in order to reflect.

Inventing

After the students have read and analyzed the models, and they have a grip on what a reflective essay is, it's time to assign the reflective essay. Tell your students that they are to write a reflective essay on an experience of their choice. The essay must be at least three hundred words, but can be as long as your students want. Distribute the assignment sheet that is listed in Appendix G.

After your students have selected their topics, give your students a reflection worksheet. This will guide their thinking and allow them to work out ideas, or develop ideas from their writer's notebook to include in their essay. You can find the reflection worksheet in Appendix H.

Students should also be given a rubric that will inform them how they are being graded. This will give them things to keep in mind while working on their reflective essay. This also holds the teacher accountable for grading the essays according to the rubric guidelines. The rubric will also prove useful in the revising section of this genre study so keep it handy. There is a sample rubric listed in Appendix I.

Planning

Before the students write their first draft they should be prepared and confident to write it. After the students have decided what to write about, a way to help the students plan is to ask your students to share their thoughts with the class about what they plan to write about. This way they can gain reassurance from the rest of the class, or the class can provide some suggestions on how to improve their idea.

Show your students how to use the information they put together using the worksheet and outline their essay. Listed in the Appendix J is a worksheet that allows students to outline their reflective essay to organize what they want to write. It outlines the basic structure a reflective essay should have, such as an introduction, a backward looking question, an inward and outward looking question, a forward looking question, and a conclusion (“Steps for Writing a Reflective Essay”). Look at one of the model essays with the class first and show them how it is organized in this fashion. Each of the elements in Appendix I provides questions to guide the student when putting ideas together. Show your students how to use the information they put together using the worksheet and plug it into these steps for writing the actual essay. There is also, listed in Appendix K, a blank outline for the students to fill in with their information.

Have the students use this outline when putting together their first draft. Begin by having them just start by writing full thoughts out on each item of their outline and the reflective essay will begin to take its shape. Have your students keep this draft in essay form, but know that the heading and formatting are not important at this stage. What is important is that they are adding thought provoking questions, descriptive language, and detail to their initial ideas made in the outline.

In writing a new type of genre that students may not be used to, it would benefit them greatly if the teacher were to show them a model they themselves had written on a topic. Do this right before they write their own because it would make them feel more comfortable getting into the process and it would be a good way to talk them through the process, the obstacles, and accomplishments they encounter.

Revising

Have them finish their first draft and hand it in. The revising process will follow a workshop style. This is where your role changes into the role of “coach,” and you “intervene when their help is needed most and when it is most effective” (Williams, 79). Workshops create a working environment of collaboration, which is beneficial to the writing process. Having the students work collaboratively and cooperatively leads your students to “work harder and discover more than they do when they perform tasks on an individual competitive basis” (Williams, 87). Keep in mind, when putting students into groups it would be wise for the teacher to assign them. It would help to put stronger writers with weaker writers so the weaker writers can receive more assistance.

Assign your students into groups of two and exchange papers. There should also be a peer review question sheet to guide the editor’s revision of the students reflective essay.

See Appendix L for a peer review sheet. The students should respond to their partner's essay using answering these questions, so distribute them before the students begin revising.

After workshops, you should instruct on the revision process. Show them what to look for and what to suggest to add in and what to take out; if your students aren't showing what they've learned and adding too much narrative, for example. "Such directions provide students with an opportunity to give substantive, genre-specific help toward revising" (Cooper, 49).

After students have revised their partner's essay with the peer review questions, have your students revise their own essays to be submitted later on. This is a good time to do a quick lesson on editing as well so the students can clear their essays of errors. There is a self-editing lesson and an exercise listed in Appendix M for them to complete. After the essays have been revised by a peer, revised by the student themselves, and edited it is time to submit their work as a final draft.

Assembling a Portfolio

This is where, as Charles Cooper puts it, your students "present themselves as attractively as possible in a portfolio" (49). Have the students put together all of their worksheets, copies of what they wrote in their writers notebooks, rough-draft, final draft, and their reflections. They can see where they started and how the finished product turned out. Really the process is what mattered the most, so it is good to have everything included, along with their final draft.

Reflection

After your students have finished assembling everything they did in this genre study, the students should take time to reflect on their process. It sounds redundant to have a reflection on a reflective essay project, but it is an important cognitive strategy that will enable students to remember what they learned about writing reflectively. By now the students should have no problem writing about what they've learned and their emotions towards this project. Also ask them to:

- Look back and see what they learned about writing about what they learned in order to write good reflective essays in the future
- Reflect on the writing process they just went through and assess it in their own words—what worked, what didn't work.
- Write about possibilities for future writing they see themselves doing in this genre.

Have them do this briefly on a sheet of loose-leaf paper and have them hand it in. These will be beneficial tools for the teacher's process too. He/she can see what worked and what the students got out of this particular genre study and what to change for the future.

Another way to get students reflecting is to have them choose a piece of writing in a different genre on which to reflect. This is especially useful when preparing for the Regents exam since they deal with several different genres on their tests. The student

could choose a favorite poem or song and write a reflective essay on how it has inspired them, or changed them, or caused them to grow. You could model this by asking the students to share a favorite poem in class and begin to draft a reflective essay right in front of them.

Publishing

A huge part of successful writing is having an audience and knowing your audience. Your student should be able to share their reflective essays with an authentic audience. As much as teachers love reading numerous student essays year after year, students should not have their only reader be the teacher! Writing should always be done with an audience in mind. Writing with an audience in mind, your students will write better because your student may not care about the finished product if the only person reading it is you. This is where the teacher can get creative and use resources. If there is a student newspaper, it would be a great experience to submit their reflective essays in this medium. The teacher can partner with the art classes or graphic design classes to put together a booklet that could be distributed around the school. The teacher can also set up a class blog that your students upload their essays to and share it with other classmates, friends, family, and the community. Classpress.com is a good website in which to start a class blogging website.

As previously mentioned, a good idea for a culminating project would be to turn the student's essay into a video composition ("Baz Luhrmann - Everybody's Free [To Wear Sunscreen) as a model. This can be done through applications such as iMovie on Mac's or Movie Maker on PC's. There will need to be a day devoted to learning the application, however, if you can get your students to successfully adapt their essay into an emotional, visual composition it will be a project the students can keep and remember. This website will assist you in the process of using iMovie ("iMovie '09") and here is a website that assists in Movie Maker ("Windows Movie Maker's How-To Center"). It's a great way to make assignments such as this more authentic and expressive. This way, the video can be shared on Youtube, the class website, Facebook, and the possibilities are endless from there. Listed in Appendix N is a mini-lesson on how to make this project happen.

The reflective essay is a valuable genre for students to learn. When students begin writing, it is best to start with themselves. Students feel most comfortable when talking about their experiences because it's what they know. "Write about what you know" is a famous expression. The genre study in reflective essay teaches writing starting from the student's experience and this skill will be valuable for the rest of their lives. There will always be times for reflection in their futures. Reflections make our histories meaningful and gauge our growth as individuals. They lead to a richer, fuller experience of our lives.

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Appendix A
***This I Believe* Homework Worksheet**

Links: [This I Believe](#)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4538138>

Please select one radio segment, based on a personal essay, and read by writers. Find a story that resonates with you. Listen carefully. Take notes. Fill out the worksheet below. You will be asked to share your selection with classmates in both a small group and the entire class.

Student:

This I Believe Title:

Author/Reader: ____ Length:

Who is the author?

What's the main idea?

Why did you choose this podcast?

Did you hear any new words or phrases? _1. _2. _3.

Who do you imagine is the audience for this podcast? Why?

Appendix B

“Wear Sunscreen” by Mary Schmich

Ladies and gentlemen of the class of '98: Wear sunscreen. If I could offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it. The long-term benefits of sunscreen have been proved by scientists whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own meandering experience. I will dispense this advice now. __Enjoy the power and beauty of your youth. Oh, never mind. You will not understand the power and beauty of your youth until they've faded. But trust me, in 20 years, you'll look back at photos of yourself and recall in a way you can't grasp now how much possibility lay before you and how fabulous you really looked. You are not as fat as you imagine. __Don't worry about the future. Or worry, but know that worrying is as effective as trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubble gum. The real troubles in your life are apt to be things that never crossed your worried mind, the kind that blind side you at 4 PM on some idle Tuesday. __Do one thing every day that scares you. __Sing. __Don't be reckless with other people's hearts. Don't put up with people who are reckless with yours. __Floss. __Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and, in the end, it's only with yourself. __Remember compliments you receive. Forget the insults. If you succeed in doing this, tell me how. __Keep your old love letters. Throw away your old bank statements. __Stretch. __Don't feel guilty if you don't know what you want to do with your life. The most interesting people I know didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting 40-year-olds I know still don't. __Get plenty of calcium. __Be kind to your knees. You'll miss them when they're gone. __Maybe you'll marry, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll have children, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll divorce at 40, maybe you'll dance the funky chicken on your 75th wedding anniversary. Whatever you do, don't congratulate yourself too much, or berate yourself either. Your choices are half chance. So are everybody else's. __Enjoy your body. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or of what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own. __Dance, even if you have nowhere to do it but your living room. __Read the directions, even if you don't follow them. __Do not read beauty magazines. They will only make you feel ugly. __Get to know your parents. You never know when they'll be gone for good. __Be nice to your siblings. They're your best link to your past and the people most likely to stick with you in the future. __Understand that friends come and go, but with a precious few you should hold on. Work hard to bridge the gaps in geography and lifestyle, because the older you get, the more you need the people who knew you when you were young. __Live in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard. __Live in Northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft. __Travel. __Accept certain inalienable truths: Prices will rise. Politicians will philander. You, too, will get old. And when you do, you'll fantasize that when you were young, prices were reasonable, politicians were noble, and children respected their elders. __Respect your elders. __Don't expect anyone else to support you. Maybe you have a trust fund. Maybe you'll have a wealthy spouse. But you never know when either one might run out. __Don't mess too much with your hair or by the time you're 40 it will look 85. __Be careful whose advice you buy, but be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of nostalgia. Dispensing it is a way of fishing the

(Kerwin, 16)

past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it's worth. __But trust me on the sunscreen.

APPENDIX C

Sample Touchstone Text Essays

1) Try the Experiment Yourself By W. Daniel Hillis

As a child, I was told that hot water freezes faster than cold water. This was easy to refute in principle, so I did not believe it.

Many years later I learned that Aristotle had described the effect in his *Meteorologica*,

"The fact that the water has previously been warmed contributes to its freezing quickly: for so it cools sooner. Hence many people, when they want to cool hot water quickly, begin by putting it in the sun. So the inhabitants of Pontus when they encamp on the ice to fish (they cut a hole in the ice and then fish) pour warm water round their reeds that it may freeze the quicker, for they use the ice like lead to fix the reeds." (E. W. Webster translation)

I was impressed as always by Aristotle's clarity, confidence and specificity. Of course, I do not expect you to be convinced that it is true simply because Aristotle said so, especially since his explanation is that "warm and cold react upon one another by recoil." (Aristotle, like us, was very good making up explanations to justify his beliefs). Instead, I hope that you will have the pleasure of being convinced, as I was, by trying the experiment yourself.

2) A Big Mind Change At Age 10: Vacuums Don't Suck! by Alan Kay

At age 10 in 1950, one of the department stores had a pneumatic tube system for moving receipts and money from counters to the cashier's office. I loved this and tried to figure out how it worked. The clerks in the store knew all about it. "Vacuum", they said, "Vacuum sucks the canisters, just like your mom's vacuum cleaner". But how does it work, I asked? "Vacuum", they said, "Vacuum, does it all". This was what adults called "an explanation"!

So I took apart my mom's Hoover vacuum cleaner to find out how it worked. There was an electric motor in there, which I had expected, but the only other thing in there was a fan! How could a fan produce a vacuum, and how could it suck?

We had a room fan and I looked at it more closely. I knew that it worked like the

propeller of an airplane, but I'd never thought about how those worked. I picked up a board and moved it. This moved air just fine. So the blades of the propeller and the fan were just boards that the motor kept on moving to push air.

But what about the vacuum? I found that a sheet of paper would stick to the back of the fan. But why? I "knew" that air was supposed to be made up of particles too small to be seen. So it was clear why you got a gust of breeze by moving a board — you were knocking little particles one way and not another. But where did the sucking of the paper on the fan and in the vacuum cleaner come from?

Suddenly it occurred to me that the air particles must be already moving very quickly and bumping into each other. When the board or fan blades moved air particles away from the fan there were less near the fan and the already moving particles would have less to bump into and would thus move towards the fan. They didn't know about the fan, but they appeared to.

The "suck" of the vacuum cleaner was not a suck at all. What was happening is that things went into the vacuum cleaner because they were being "blown in" by the air particles' normal movement, which were not being opposed by the usual pressure of air particles inside the fan!

When my physiologist father came home that evening I exclaimed "Dad, the air particles must be moving at least a hundred miles an hour!". I told him what I'd found out and he looked in his physics book. In there was a formula to compute the speed of various air molecules at various temperatures. It turned out that at room temperature ordinary air molecules were moving much faster than I had guessed: more like 1500 miles an hour! This completely blew my mind!

Then I got worried because even small things were clearly not moving that fast going into the vacuum cleaner (nor in the pneumatic tubes). By putting my hand out the window of the car I could feel that the air was probably going into the vacuum cleaner closer to 50 or 60 miles an hour. Another conversation with my Dad led to two ideas (a) the fan was probably not very efficient at moving particles away, and (b) the particles themselves were going in every direction and bumping into each other (this is why it takes a while for perfume from an open bottle to be smelled across a room).

This experience was a big deal for me because I had thought one way using a metaphor and a story about "sucking", and then I suddenly thought just the opposite because of an experiment and non-story thinking. The world was not as it seemed! Or as most adults thought and claimed! I never trusted "just a story" again.

APPENDIX D

Sample Student Reflective Essay

Depending on Yourself

A reflective essay by Andrew Burton

Have you ever been told something by somebody, acted upon what you were told, then found out what they told you was wrong? This just goes to show that you should never rely on anybody else's word. I have always been told that attitude is everything. If you want to do accomplish something, your attitude towards your goal is the most important factor in your success. However, my personal experiences say otherwise. In seventh grade P.E. class, I had taken up the attitude that P.E. is a waste of time, and was not motivated to actively exert effort in the class. This kept up throughout the year, and my grade at the end was a "B". The next year, I decided I had better change my ways. I made sure to show enthusiasm and effort throughout the year. My final grade this time? Still a "B". This has forever disheartened me from trying to get an A in P.E., since it seems that nothing you do can change your grade. Even if you change your attitude, the result can be the same.

The necessity of self-reliance becomes more and more apparent if you start to search for examples. For instance, several of my friends had a certain teacher for a physics class, who was often wrong in his teachings, but unwilling to admit to his mistakes. They had to compare what he had taught them with information in other places, to make sure he wasn't teaching the lessons incorrectly. Due to his mistakes, they had to rely on themselves, not the word of the teacher. My parents always tell me that if I don't want homework to be such a chore, that I have to motivate myself. I took their advice with an open mind, and got myself motivated for a history essay. But when the time came to write it, it was just as bad as any other. It did not seem to matter whether or not I was motivated in writing my essay, despite what I was told by my parents. What people tell you to do, even if it may have worked for them, will not always work for you. It is a good practice to base your decisions off of your own personal experiences instead of depending on other people's predictions.

1. Why is this an example of a reflective essay? Is there anything it needs?

Appendix E

Important Characteristics of a Reflective Essay

1. About a personal experience
2. Shows what was learned/how you grew or did not grow
3. Connects feelings, emotions, thoughts and attitudes
4. Looks backward
5. Looks forward
6. Looks inward
7. States why you wrote on the topic
8. Shows what was accomplished or not accomplished
9. Reacts/responds to experience

Appendix F

Prompts for Writing Reflective Essays

1. As you reflect on your experiences over the last several years, you should try to imagine the person you were when you arrived here as a freshman. Think about the many ways your life has changed since then. Ask yourself how much you have learned over the past four years, both in and out of the classroom. Ask yourself how much you have matured emotionally. Ask yourself how you have grown spiritually or ethically. Ask yourself how you have come to understand your place in society, your social roles and responsibilities. You are a very different person from the one who arrived here four years ago—older, more experienced, less naïve and uncertain--and the reflective essay gives you an opportunity to describe the journey, to document the story, of the metamorphosis you have experienced up to this point in your life. And remember that what we are discussing here is not merely a listing of activities or a cataloging of experiences. Growth and maturity are not simply the result of doing activities and checking items off a list. Growth and maturity result from changes in perception. And it is these changes in perception that should guide the writing of your essay.
2. Describe an event in your life that ironically appeared bad at first but eventually turned out to be good. Tell the story of the event that you experienced and explain to your readers how an event that seemed negative turned out to have valuable consequences.
3. Many people feel pressure to conform to the prevailing attitudes and styles of their peers, yet there are times when they do not conform. Reflect on an incident in which you acted in a nonconforming way. Describe the incident and the consequences of it. Support your view with reasons and examples.
4. Think of a time in your life that you were moved beyond words. What event was this? How did this even change your life? What did you learn from it? In what ways was it a turning point for you?
5. Reflect on your family experience. Whether they have been good or bad experiences, everyone can reflect on what they learned, how they grew, and how they were affected by being a part of a family. What role did you play in your family? How did you affect other members of your family?

Questions derived from (Gunnar), (Guides for Writing the Senior Reflective Essay PDF).

Appendix G

Reflective Essay Writing Assignment Handout

Name: _____

Task...

To write a reflective essay on an experience of your choice.

Objectives...

The essay should reflect your understanding of the elements of a reflective essay. Remember you can use the prompts as guides for your topic.

Audience... Your friends and family, online community, as well as classmates. This essay will be posted on our class website.

Publication...

Some essays will be included in the school magazine, while all of them will be posted to our class website. After this assignment is over, we will also be adapting essays into an audio/visual composition, similar to the “Wear Sunscreen” video you watched.

Guidelines...

Your reflective essay should:

- Be 300 words or longer
- Follow the “Characteristics of a Reflective Essay” handout you received earlier
- Be free of punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors
- Have an organized form

Deadlines...

Draft 1 is due _____

Draft 2 is due _____

Final Draft is due _____

Appendix H

Reflection Worksheet

Task: You are to write a reflective essay on three hundred words or more on an experience of your choice.

Use this as a guide for your reflective essay assignment.

PART A: Recapture the experience

1. What was the experience? What are your thoughts, reactions, and judgments regarding the experience? Be aware of the context surrounding the experience.

2. What were your feelings during the experience? Try to understand the range and depth of your feelings at the time of the experience and directly after it. Include positive as well as negative experiences.

PART B: Evaluate the experience

3. How do you now evaluate the experience? What new insights or information have been revealed?

--

PART C: Future experiences

4. How will you use this knowledge in future experiences?

(“Guide Reflective Essay”)

Appendix I

Reflective Essay Rubric

Name: _____

Assessment	Superior	At Standard	Developing	Needs Work	Comments
Form	Uses an organized, structured, paragraph/essay form.	Essay form is used.	There is not a clear organization to the paragraphs and essays.	There is no discernable structure to the essay.	
Grammar	Syntax is exemplary and dynamic and all spelling is correct.	All syntax and spelling is correct.	Some syntax is correct. There are one or more spelling errors.	Little syntax is correct. There are one or more spelling errors.	
Content: Backward, Inward, Outward, and Forward looking reflective questions are addressed.	The reflective question is thoroughly addressed using rich, descriptive detail with verve and graceful, effortless language. The essay flows smoothly and engages the reader fully.	The reflective question is thoroughly addressed using descriptive detail and effortless, efficient language. The essay flows easily and engages the reader.	The reflective question is addressed using some detail and awkward language. The essay flows unevenly and the reader is somewhat confused.	The reflective question is not distinguishable. Little or no details are used and the essay stumbles awkwardly. The reader is uninformed and indifferent.	
Includes the “important characteristics of a reflective essay” from the handout	The student includes all of the important characteristics.	The student includes 7-9 of most of the character	The student includes 3-6 of the important characteristics.	The student uses 0-2 of the important characteristics.	

Appendix J

Mini-Lesson outline for writing the reflective essay

WRITING A REFLECTIVE ESSAY – OUTLINE FORMAT

1. Introduction and Backward Looking Question
 - A. Introductory Sentence – Hook the reader! If you can think of a catchy phrase write it down, although many times catchy introductory sentences come after you have written your paper.
 - B. Describe the project. This is important step. Let the reader know what you will be talking about.
 - C. Address a Backward looking question. Be specific and give details.
 - D. Transition sentence for next paragraph
2. Inward Looking Question
 - A. Address an inward looking question.
 - B. Make sure to use one or more examples that illustrate your answer to inward looking question.
 - C. Give details.
 - D. Transition sentence for next paragraph
3. Outward Looking Question
 - A. Address an outward looking question
 - B. Make sure to use one or more examples that illustrate your answer to outward looking question.
 - C. Give details.
 - D. Transition sentence for next paragraph
4. Forward Looking Question and Conclusion
 - A. Address a forward looking question.
 - B. Make sure to use one or more examples that illustrate your answer to forward looking question.
 - C. Give details.
 - D. Tie it all together. Conclude with another catchy or crisp sentence. Sometimes it is useful to connect your concluding sentence to your introductory sentence. The concluding sentence should leave the reader laughing, thinking or just plain impress!

(From Steps for Writing a Reflective Essay)

Appendix K

Fill-in outline for reflective essay

1. Introduction and Backward Looking Question
 - a. Introductory Sentence – _____

 - b. Describe the project. This is important step. Let the reader know what you will be talking about. _____

 - c. Address a Backward looking question. Be specific and give details.

 - d. Transition sentence for next paragraph _____

2. Inward Looking Question
 - a. Address an inward looking question. _____

 - b. Make sure to use one or more examples that illustrate your answer to inward looking question. _____

 - c. Give details. _____

 - d. Transition sentence for next paragraph _____

3. Outward Looking Question
 - a. Address an outward looking question _____

 - b. Make sure to use one or more examples that illustrate your answer to outward looking question. _____

 - c. Give details.

 - d. Transition sentence for next paragraph _____

4. Forward Looking Question and Conclusion
 - a. Address a forward looking question. _____

 - b. Make sure to use one or more examples that illustrate your answer to forward looking question. _____

 - c. Give details.

Tie it all together. Conclude with another catchy or crisp sentence. Sometimes it is useful to connect your concluding sentence to your introductory sentence. The concluding sentence should leave the reader laughing, thinking or just plain impress!

Appendix L

Peer review questions

1. Does the writer draw from his/her personal experience effectively? Why or why not?
2. Does the writer explain what he/she learned as a result of this experience? How is this experience made clear to you?
3. How does the writer react or respond to the experience mentioned? Is the experience being talked about clear to you?
4. How does the writer use vivid, descriptive language in his/her piece? If yes, give an example.
5. Does the writer address inward, outward, backward, and forward looking questions?
6. Does the writer connect feeling and emotion to his/her reflections? If yes, why, and if no, how can they improve this?
7. What is the writer's form like?
8. What other suggestions would make to this person's reflective essay?

Practice:

On Sunday, Anthony went over to Nick's house to play basketball. They played a game of one-on-one. Anthony made six baskets but Nick made 8. Nick was the winner. After the game, both boys went in side to watch television.

Directions: Edit these sentences. Look for mistakes in punctuation, grammar, capitalization, spelling, and missing words. Use editing marks to mark the mistakes.

1. Do you no what ryan ate last week end?
2. My brekfast the other day is eggs sausage and cheese on a bagel.
3. First, the cook mixed the flower in, then he mix the batter.
4. My dad drooped the spatula. It hurt his foot.
5. Want to go eat at Daves dinner?
6. I like peanut butter in my aunt jemimah pancakes because it taste real good.
7. how many tablespoons of sugar are I supposed to add?
8. Baxter my dog ate an entire wheel of chees that was in the refrigerator?
9. Although I really want to eat pizza for breakfast, I know I should have something healthy like eggs and fruit and wheaties.

my friend who's a great cook, makes me some waffles from time to time.

Appendix N

Mini-lesson on adapting essay into a video composition.

Objective: Day 1 will be spent in the computer lab instructing the students on how to use the movie application. Students will practice using it as well. The students will adapt their essays into a video composition.

Day 2: **Instruction:**

- Students will schedule times throughout the day to record their speech, using a microphone. This is essential, because it needs to be quiet in the background. Students will save their voice recordings and begin putting together images tomorrow. For homework, have students bring in digital photos or film that can be put into their video.
- After students have voices recorded, have them begin gathering images to put in their video. They can bring in personal digital images or digital film recordings, or they can search the Internet for images. Make sure students cite each image or video they use in their composition.
- Students can add music to the background as long as it does not interfere with the voice recording. Music must also be cited.
- Once students have all the elements of their video together and they feel confident that it is done, have them convert the video into Quicktime, or another movie player application that will allow them to publish their video on the Internet.
- Have a “video night” and invited students, parents, and other school mates to watch the students essays.

Free Essay: Reflective essay My plan: Introduction: I aim to discuss what methods of learning I have felt particularly successful during my first year and...Â My reasons for studying may be completely different from my peers. I learn to get a wider knowledge about my subject and also to get a high grade.Â the genre of reflective writing and essays. Now-a-days scholars are debating over to include reflective essays in the world of academic writing, as the very topic can be hard to When evaluating reflective essays it is undeniable that speculative writing pieces and academic writing documents follow similar paths in ideas such as objectivity, hedging, and structure methods. Reflective essays have definitely changed over the course of the years!