

Ideas for Teaching Literature

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Biography

GRADE LEVELS: 6

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Reading comprehension, main ideas

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

MULTIMEDIA TIMELINE

PURPOSE: To allow students to demonstrate an understanding of main ideas within a biography by creating a multimedia timeline.

1. Allow students to choose a biography or autobiography from an approved list.
2. As students read, have them note the main events and significant moments in the biography or autobiography.
3. Once students have finished the autobiography, introduce the idea of a Multimedia Timeline. The Timeline will be created online using the free website builder Weebly. This timeline may include:
 - A. Text
 - B. Images (photos, illustrations)
 - C. Audio Files
 - D. Video Files
3. Have students decide which main events and significant moments from the biography should be included in the timeline, as well as what types of media would best represent these events and moments.
4. Once students have a plan for their timeline, they can spend a few days collecting and creating the elements for the timeline.
5. The class will spend time in a computer lab creating the Weebly timelines and adding content to them.
6. Once students have completed the timelines, they will be linked to on the class website so that students can view each other's work and can share their work with others.

EXAMPLES: *Yes We Can* by Garen Thomas, *Mr. Williams* by Karen Barbour, *Boy* by Roald Dahl, *A Dangerous Engine* by Joan Dash and Dusan Petricic.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Understanding autobiography, main ideas and details

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

MY STORY

PURPOSE: To demonstrate students' understanding of the autobiography by having them create their own autobiographical video or poem.

1. Read an autobiography, such as Walter Dean Myers' *Bad Boy*, together as a class.
2. While students are reading, have them keep a reading journal of the types of events and main ideas that are included in the autobiography, as well as the type of details that are included.
3. Once the class has finished reading the autobiography, have students brainstorm what events, main ideas and details they would include in their own autobiography. Some questions to ask might include:
 - A. What person has had the most influence on your life?
 - B. Have you ever had an experience that changed your life?
 - C. What was the happiest day of your life? The saddest?
 - D. What three words best describe you?
 - E. What three words would your family use to describe you? How would your friends or teachers describe you?
4. After students have brainstormed, explain that they will be creating either an autobiographical poem or short video.
5. Once students have decided which project they will create, provide time for planning.
 - A. Students who choose to create a poem should:
 1. Narrow down which events and details will be included
 2. Decide on the type of poetry they will write
 3. Beginning working on drafts
 - B. Students who choose to create a video should:
 1. Narrow down which events and details will be included
 2. Decide how they will be filming the video (for example, they can choose to be in it themselves, or to show photos and other images while they narrate).

3. Begin drafting a script for the video.
6. Provide students with enough time to complete their work.
7. Host an Autobiography Festival in which students can show their videos and read their poems aloud to the class.

EXAMPLES: *Bad Boy* by Walter Dean Myers, *Anne Frank: Diary of A Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *Fat Girl: A True Story* by Judith Moore, *Hole In My Life* by Jack Gantos.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Reading comprehension, critical thinking

TYPE OF IDEA: Game

BIOGRAPHY GAME

PURPOSE: Have students demonstrate an understanding of biographies and autobiographies read in class through a game.

1. After a unit on biography or autobiography in which students have read at least three books together, pass out slips of paper with the subject of one biography or autobiography on each.
2. Have students find an image that they think represents the person on their piece of paper and bring it in to class the next day. Have students also bring in one word that they think best describes the subject. Have students write the name of their subject on the back of their image and word.

For example: If students read *Something Out of Nothing: Marie Curie and Radium* by Carla Killough McClafferty, an image might be of a beaker and a word might be “Brilliant.”

3. The next day, gather students’ images and words into separate piles and divide the class into teams of four.
4. Alternate showing the class an image and a word while the groups discuss their answers and write them down.
5. Each group presents their written answer and receives a point if it is correct.
6. After all of the images and words have been shown, calculate the final score and hand out prizes to the winning team(s).
7. After the game, discuss the following questions with students:
 - A. What images and words were most difficult to figure out?
 - B. Which images and words do you think were the most accurate?
 - C. Which do you think were the most creative?

EXAMPLES: *Something Out of Nothing: Marie Curie and Radium* by Carla Killough McClafferty; *Seacows, Shamans and Scurvy* by Ann Arnold; *Leon’s Story* by Leon Walter Tillage and Susan L. Roth; *Leaving Glorytown* by Eduardo F. Calcines.

GRADE LEVELS: 11

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Themes, Main Ideas, Details, Compare and Contrast

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity

FILMS VS. BOOKS

PURPOSE: For students to demonstrate an understanding of the themes, main ideas and details of a biography or autobiography by comparing film and book versions.

1. After a class has read a biography or autobiography together, ask students to answer the following questions:

- A. What are the main themes of the biography or autobiography?
- B. Aside from the subject, who are the other main characters?
- C. What events or ideas are most important in this book?
- D. What are some of the secondary events or ideas in the book?
- E. What three words best describe the subject as depicted in this book?

2. Next, screen a film adaptation of the biography or autobiography for the class.

3. After viewing, have students answer the following questions?

- A. What are the main themes of this film?
- B. How are these themes different than those depicted in the book?
- C. Aside from the subject, who are the other main characters in the film?
- D. Are there any characters in the film that are not in the book or vice versa?
- E. What events or ideas are most important in this film?
- F. Are these events and ideas the same as in the book or different?
- G. What are some of the secondary events or ideas in the film? Are the same in the book?
- E. What three words best describe the subject as depicted in this film? Are these the same words you used to describe the subject as depicted in the book?

4. After students have answered these questions on their own, break students into groups of three or four and have them discuss their answers with their group members and come to a consensus on whether they would recommend the book or the film.

5. Have the groups share their answers with the rest of the class, using their notes and group discussion to support their claims.

EXAMPLES: *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt and the 1999 film *Angela's Ashes*, *Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickam and the 1999 film *October Sky*, *Tuesdays With Morrie* by Mitch Albom and the 1999 film *Tuesdays With Morrie*, *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman and the 2002 film *The Pianist*.

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main Ideas, Theme, Details, Writing

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

OBITUARY

PURPOSE: To have students demonstrate understanding of the main ideas, details and themes of a biography by writing an obituary article for the subject of the book.

1. Let students each select a biography from a list of approved books, preferably those that feature deceased subjects.
2. Once students have finished reading their books, ask them to answer the following questions:
 - A. What are the main ideas or events in this book?
 - B. What are the main themes in this book? Or, what words might you use to define the subject's life?
 - C. Who are the other important characters in the book?
 - D. What is the subjects' greatest accomplishment?
3. Bring newspapers into class and have students read the obituaries.
4. Ask students to note what elements make up an obituary. Answers should include:
 - A. The person's career
 - B. The person's family
 - C. When and where the person was born and died.
 - D. How the person will be remembered or what others have to say about the person.
 - E. The person's greatest or most notable accomplishment or contribution to their community.
5. Have students create an obituary for the subject of the biography they read. Ask students to use their answers from steps 2 and 4 to create the content in the obituary.

6. Have students type up their obituaries in the style of a newspaper, giving themselves a byline, typing in columns and creating a headline. Students may choose to add a photo or illustration of the subject.

7. Compile all of the obituaries into a single packet. Photocopy the packet and distribute to the class so that everyone can view each other's work and learn the main ideas and themes of each other's biographies.

EXAMPLES: *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer, *I Touch the Future* by Robert T. Hohler, *Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different* by Karen Blumenthal, *Madame Curie: A Biography* by Eve Curie.

GRADE LEVELS: 11

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main ideas, themes, details, writing for variety of audiences

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

TELL ME A STORY

PURPOSE: For students to demonstrate understanding of the main ideas, themes and details of a biography or autobiography by retelling the story as a book for children.

1. Have students choose a biography or autobiography from a list of approved books.
2. Once students have read their books, have them answer the following questions:
 - A. What are the main themes of the biography or autobiography?
 - B. Aside from the subject, who are the other main characters?
 - C. What events or ideas are most important in this book?
 - D. What are some of the secondary events or ideas in the book?
 - E. What three words best describe the subject as depicted in this book?
3. Next, bring in some biographies or autobiographies that were created as picture books for children. Have students read these books and answer the following questions.
 - A. How do these books differ from biographies or autobiographies written for adults in length and style?
 - B. What is the importance of illustration in children's stories?
 - C. How do these books differ from biographies or autobiographies written for adults in content and language?
 - D. What elements from the adult book that you read would be appropriate in a children's book? What would need to be left out or somehow censored?
4. Have students create a children's storybook based on the adult book they read. Have students use their answers from steps 2 and 3 to outline their story and decide what content it should contain. Books should be between 12-15 pages in length.

5. Once students have outlined their stories, have them draft and plan for the types of images they will include in the story.

6. Have students peer edit and workshop until final products are complete.

7. Arrange for a visit with elementary school students so that the books can be read to their intended audience. Let students decide if they would like to donate their books to an elementary class or school library.

EXAMPLES: *Going Solo* by Roald Dahl, *The Greatest: Muhammad Ali* by Walter Dean Myers, *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller, *Gather Together in My Name* by Maya Angelou.

Drama

GRADE LEVELS: 6

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Understanding character and comprehension

TYPE OF IDEA: Learning Centers

CHARACTER CARNIVAL

PURPOSE: For students to demonstrate comprehension and understanding of a play through a character learning centers

1. After the class has finished a play, break students into four groups.
2. Create four learning centers, set up in the following ways:

A. 20 Questions

At this center, one student will blindly draw a character name from a hat or bag and the other students in the group will ask the student up to 20 yes or no questions to try to determine who the character is. Students will take turn drawing names until it is time to move on to the next center.

B. Whose Line Is It

At this center, students will blindly draw character quotes from a hat or bag and the group will work together to determine which character said each quote. Students will take turns drawing names until it is time to move on to the next center.

C. Character Survey

At this center, students will be provided with surveys that ask questions about preferences, such as favorite color, favorite food, and favorite holiday. Students will blindly draw a character's name from a bag or hat and will individually complete the surveys as the character would answer the questions. Once everyone in the group has finished, students will share their answers and discuss which answers seem most accurate for the character.

D. Picture It

At this center, students will blindly draw a character's name from a bag or hat and will then individually draw what they think the character looks like. Students will be provided with paper and art supplies. Once everyone in the group has completed their drawings, the members can present their work and discuss similarities and differences in the depictions.

3. Once every group has visited each center, the entire class will discuss what they learned. Questions to ask could include:

A. Which center activities were the easiest? Most difficult?

B. Were some characters more easy to remember/guess/depict than others? Why do you think this is?

EXAMPLES: *Alice* adapted by Lindsay Price from Lewis Carroll, *The Monkey's Paw* adapted by Louis N. Parker from W.W. Jacobs, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *Mr. Icky* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

GRADE LEVELS: 7

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Performing and interpreting drama

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

PUPPET THEATER

PURPOSE: To have students interpret and perform a one act play to better understand the visual and spoken aspects of drama.

1. Break students into groups of five or six and assign each student a one act play, preferably a comedy or fairy tale, such as *Mr. Icky* by F. Scott Fitzgerald or *Damsel in Distress* by Scott M. Sparling
2. Explain that they will be creating performing their plays as a puppet theatre production.
3. Allow students time to read the play through a few times and decide upon roles and responsibilities. These will include:
 - A. Actors
 - B. Puppet creators
 - C. Set designers
 - D. Director
4. Provide students with socks or paper bags, large pieces of paper or poster board, and art supplies to create the puppets, backdrop and any needed props.
5. Allow students time to practice throughout a few days.
6. Invite younger students or another class to watch the performances.
7. After the performances are finished, have students reflect on the following questions:
 - A. What was the most difficult aspect of dramatizing the play?
 - B. Were there any pieces of dialogue that you would have written differently or that you think could be left out?
 - C. Was there anything you would do differently if you had the chance to dramatize this play again?

EXAMPLES: *Mr. Icky* by F. Scott Fitzgerald or *Damsel in Distress* by Scott M. Sparling, *The Golden Goose* by Karen T. Riehl, *The Great American Talent Show* by Joseph Robinette.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Analyzing the elements of drama

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity

DIRECTOR'S TALK

PURPOSE: To have students think about how a play might be transformed into a film in order to analyze the elements of drama.

1. After reading a play, such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, show students a film version of the play.

2. After viewing, discuss how the play was transformed into a film. Consider the following questions:

A. Were any characters left out?

B. Were any scenes left out?

C. Was the dialogue left mostly intact?

D. What were some major differences between the play and the film?

3. Read a second play together as a class, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

4. Break students into groups of three or four and have them imagine that they are turning the play into a film. Ask the following questions:

A. What characters will be featured in the film? Will any be left out?

B. Who would you hire to play each of the characters?

B. Where would you film this (on location, on set, a specific city)?

C. What would the sets look like?

D. Would any scenes need to be lengthened, shortened, or left out completely?

E. What would this film be rated? Who is the ideal audience?

5. Each group will present their ideas for the film to the entire class and will discuss the similarities and differences among their visions for the film.

EXAMPLES: *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, *A Gilgamesh Play for Teen Readers* by Jerry Parks, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams.

GRADE LEVELS: 10

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Exploring character

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity

NO SMALL ROLES

PURPOSE: Students will explore the story of a minor character within a play by drawing on information from the text and using their own imaginations to create a robust character.

1. After the class has read a play in which there are a few minor characters, such as any William Shakespeare play, split the class into groups of three or four.
2. Let the groups each choose one minor character from the play, such as the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*.
3. Have each group brainstorm to list everything they know about their character from reading the play. They should consider:
 - A. What role does Character play in the plot?
 - B. What would be different if Character were not in the play?
 - C. Which major characters interact with Character?
 - D. Does Characters' life change because of the events in the play?
4. Once the groups have this list, have them answer the following questions:
 - A. Where did Character grow up? What was his or her childhood like?
 - B. What are Character's greatest hopes? Greatest fears?
 - C. What is a typical day like for Character?
 - D. What does Character's home look like?
 - E. If Character had one wish, what would it be?
5. Once the groups have answered these questions, have them write a short monologue from the point of view of their character. The monologue can be from any point in the character's life, but should incorporate the responses to the questions from # 3 and 4.
6. Have a representative from each group read the monologue to the entire class.

7. Once everyone is done, let the class decide which minor character they would most like to see featured as a major character in his or her own play.

EXAMPLES: *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *You Can't Take It With You* by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller.

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Understanding setting, events, conflict and characters in drama

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

MAKING MEMORIES

PURPOSE: To allow students to demonstrate understanding of a play's setting, events, conflict and characters by creating a collaborative scrapbook.

1. After the class has completed a play, such as George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, break students into groups of three or four.
2. Let each group decide which major character they will make a scrapbook for (repeats are fine).
3. Have the students brainstorm what type of items would be in this person's scrapbook. Items could include:
 - A. Photos or drawings
 - B. Notes from one character to another
 - C. Ticket stubs, programs, or receipts
 - D. Journal entries or poems about an experience
4. Have students brainstorm what elements of the play should be represented in the scrapbook. They should include:
 - A. Important events and conflicts
 - B. An indication of the setting of the play
 - C. Representation of other characters
5. Provide students with paper and art supplies to create the items in the scrapbook.
6. Once all the items are assembled, have each group write an introduction to the scrapbook from the point of view of the character. The introduction should sound like the character, using the same language and style as the character does in the play.
7. Once the scrapbooks are complete, put them on display so that students can view each other's work.

EXAMPLES: *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare, *Arsenic and Old Lace* by Joseph Kesserling, *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde.

GRADE LEVELS: 11

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Writing about and critiquing drama

TYPE OF IDEA: Bulletin Board and Collaborative Activity

DRAMA CRITIC BULLETIN BOARD

PURPOSE: To help students learn how to write about and critique drama in constructive ways.

1. Once the entire class has finished reading an assigned play, such as *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, hand out copies of professional reviews of other plays (not the one that was read by the class).

2. Ask students to list what these critics pay attention to. Examples could include:

A. Character development

B. Themes

C. Conflict

D. Setting

3. Set up a bulletin board for the play, displaying the title and author and interesting graphics. Leave most of the board empty.

4. Have students write their own review of the play, complete with headlines and graphics illustrating a scene from the play.

5. Post the reviews to the board and have students present their review to the class.

6. Once everyone has had a chance to present their review, lead the class in a discussion on the reviews. Have the students answer the following questions:

A. Are there common points in each of the reviews?

B. Were there any controversial points in the reviews or major differences of opinion?

C. Did any of the reviews change your opinion of the play? Which ones and why?

EXAMPLES:

Our Town by Thornton Wilder, *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose, *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare

Non-Fiction

GRADE LEVELS: 6

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Introduce students to historical period and create interest

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity (Before Reading)

A WALK THROUGH HISTORY

PURPOSE: Pre-reading activity for historical non-fiction, intended to introduce students to the historical period and create interest in the literature

1. Before beginning a work of historical non-fiction, such as *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip M. Hoose, display pictures, images and (if possible) artifacts of the time period and setting throughout the classroom.

For example: *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* takes place in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 and 1956 and tells the story of a teenage civil rights activist. For this book, the classroom display could include photos of segregation, news articles about the civil rights movement, and video clips of Martin Luther King, Jr. speaking.

2. Have students tour the classroom, giving them the majority of the class period to explore and observe.

3. After students have had enough time to observe, have them answer the following questions:

A. What are your reactions to what you just saw?

B. What do you know about the time period and setting depicted in the classroom?

C. What are some problems or issues that existed at this historical time?

D. What three words would you use to describe this time period?

E. Does anything about this time period confuse you? What aspects of it would you like to know more about?

4. Use student responses to lead a discussion on the time period, making sure to address any questions they had.

EXAMPLES:

Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice by Phillip M. Hoose, *Witches: The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem* by Rosalyn Schanzer, *Beyond Courage: The Untold Story of Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust* by Doreen Rappaport, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* by Nathaniel Filbrick.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main Ideas, Drawing Inferences

TYPE OF IDEA: Learning Center

TIME TRAVELLER

PURPOSE: A pre-reading activity to introduce students to a particular time period by breaking down elements of that time into learning centers.

1. Prior to reading a work of historical non-fiction, create four learning centers that will introduce students to various elements of the time period in which the work is set. The elements may change, depending on the period, but for a book set in 1950s America, the learning centers would feature:

A. Cultural

This center would have images, newspaper clippings and items that represent culture in the 1950s, such as posters from the films *Rebel Without A Cause* and *The Ten Commandments*, images from the television show *Leave It to Beaver*, rock n roll albums, models or images of classic cars, etc...

B. Social

This center would have newspaper clippings and images about the G.I. Bill, rising birth rates, the growth of the suburbs and car ownership, segregation, the rise of teen culture, etc...

C. Technological

This center would have images, newspaper clippings and items that represent new and popular technologies in the 1950s, such as the atom bomb, space flight, the polio vaccine, radio and television technology, etc...

D. Political

This center would have images and newspaper clippings of political events of the 1950s, such as civil rights and segregation, Eisenhower, the Korean War, McCarthyism, etc...

2. Break students into four groups and tell them that they are going to be time travelers to 1950s America (or the period of the book). Tell them they will be learning about the cultural, social, technological and political aspects of this time period, but give no other explanation of what they will be seeing and exploring.

3. Hand out small notepads and instruct students to record their thoughts and impressions at each station. Since the items at each center have no written explanation from a present day point of view, students will be required to make inferences about what they are seeing.

4. Once each group has been to each center, ask the groups to draw some conclusions about the time period. Ask the following questions:

- A. What do you know about the culture in the 1950s? How do you know this?
 - B. What do you know about society in the 1950s? How do you know this?
 - C. What do you know about technology in the 1950s? How do you know this?
 - D. What do you know about politics in the 1950s? How do you know this?
5. After the groups have discussed this, have each group present their findings to the class.
6. Lead the entire class in a discussion about what they saw and what inferences they made about 1950s America.

EXAMPLES: *Summer of '49* by David Halberstam, *The Fifties* by David Halberstam, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* by David von Drehle, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main ideas, details

TYPE OF IDEA: Game

THANKSGIVING: FACT OR FICTION

PURPOSE: For students to demonstrate an understanding of ideas presented in the book *Thanksgiving: The True Story* by Penny Coleman through a fun game.

1. Assign students to read *Thanksgiving: The True Story*, a book that addresses the myths about Thanksgiving and provides the truth.
2. As students read, have them keep a reading journal with two columns, one for Facts and one for Fictions. Have students record information from the book in the appropriate columns as they read.
3. After the class has completed reading the book, host a Thanksgiving: Fact or Fiction game based on the book.
 - A. Break the class into two teams.
 - B. Present one student at a time with either a Fact or a Fiction that is present in the book.
 - C. One student from Team A will go first, then Team B, and so on.
 - D. If a student correctly identifies the Fact or Fiction without consulting his or her reading journal, his or her team receives two points.
 - E. If a student chooses to consult his or her reading journal before answering, his or her team will receive one point for a correct answer.
 - F. Questions should be formatted as follows:

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set the date for Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday of November (approved by Congress in 1941). Fact or Fiction?
 - F. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.
 - G. Students may take notes in their reading journal throughout the game to correct or clarify any information they have written down.
4. By the end of the game, students should have a better grasp on the material featured in *Thanksgiving: The True Story*.

GRADE LEVELS: 11
EMPHASIS/SKILL: Themes,
TYPE OF IDEA: Project

CHASING THE DREAM

PURPOSE: To have students explore the idea of the American Dream by conducting interviews after reading John Steinbeck's 1966 essay "Paradox and Dream."

1. Ask students to define "the American Dream." Brainstorm as a class, writing down ideas on a blackboard or whiteboard.

Examples may include: financial security; a home, a job, two kids and a dog; happiness; freedom to do and be what you want; being better off than your parents; a house with a white picket fence; being able to pursue your dreams, the chance to succeed, etc.

2. After brainstorming, ask students the following questions:

A. Is the idea of the American Dream unique to Americans, or is it a "Human" Dream?

B. Do you believe the American Dream has changed over time? If so, how?

C. Do all U.S. citizens have equal opportunities to achieve the American Dream? What do you base your opinion on?

D. Is the belief in the American Dream necessary to society? Why or why not?

E. How do you personally define the American Dream?

3. Read aloud John Steinbeck's essay "Paradox and Dream."

4. After reading, have students write a brief reflection on the essay and the prior discussion on the American Dream.

5. Break students into pairs and have them come up with a list of people from a different generation than their own that they may interview about their idea and experiences of the American Dream.

6. Have students narrow down their choice of interviewee and provide time (about a week) for students to conduct their interviews.

7. After students have conducted their interviews, have them create a visual representation (collage, paint, etc. . .) of their interview and present their interview and visual representations to the class.

8. After everyone has presented, lead the class in a discussion on the projects. Some questions to ask may include:

A. How do age, culture, class or gender affect people's experiences of the American Dream?

B. What are some similarities among these projects?

C. What are some differences among these projects?

D. What can we conclude about the American Dream?

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main ideas, persuasive writing

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity

MAKING A DOCUMENTARY

PURPOSE: To have students explore persuasive writing by planning a documentary based on a persuasive essay.

1. Break students into pairs and have them select a persuasive essay from a list of approved books.

2. Have the pairs read their essays and answer the following questions:

A. What is the author's main point?

B. What evidence does the author use to support his or her claim?

C. What could the author do to make a stronger argument?

D. Are you persuaded to believe the author's argument? Why or why not?

3. Explain to students that they will be planning for a documentary based on their persuasive essay. They will not be creating the documentary, just planning for it.

Note:

Students may choose to plan for a documentary that supports the same argument as the author of the persuasive essay. Or, if the students do not believe the author made a convincing argument, they may plan a documentary that argues against the author's claim.

4. Have the pairs of students address the following in their documentary plan:

A. What is the name of the documentary?

B. Who would you interview for the documentary? What questions would you ask

C. What types of images or footage would you include in the documentary?

D. Where would you film the documentary?

E. What kind of music would you use in the documentary?

F. Who would narrate the documentary?

G. Would the documentary be organized similarly to the essay, or would you rearrange the argument? Why?

5. After students have created their documentary plans, have them present their plans to the class.

EXAMPLES: *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: New and Classic Essays* by Garth S. Jowett and Victoria J. O'Donnell, *Lessons in Persuasion: Creative Nonfiction* by Lee Gutkind, *Voices on Stage and In Print* by Bonnie Moore and Susan Anderson, *Bending Opinion* by Tom Van Haften.

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main ideas, details, characterization

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity/Game

CHARACTER PARTY

PURPOSE: To have students better understand the main ideas and details about an historical figure in a work of historical non-fiction by dressing up as them and coming to class in character

1. Have students select an historical non-fiction book from an approved list. The books should feature a prominent historical figure.
2. As students read their books, have them take notes and answer the following questions:
 - A. What words best describe the historical character featured in your book?
 - B. What is the character's historical significance?
 - C. What does the character look like? Sound like?
 - D. Describe the historical setting of the book.
 - E. What is life like for the character?
 - E. How would the character feel about the world today?
3. Let students know there will be a Character Party at which students will come to class dressed up and acting like their characters. Students will be expected to speak knowledgeably as these characters, noting their contributions and details of their lives.
4. On the day of the party, have students introduce themselves to the entire class so that everyone has some idea of who everyone else is.
5. After introductions, let students mingle with each other while they write down at least one fact they have learned from each student.
6. At the end of the party, the student(s) who have collected the most facts may receive a prize.
7. Lead students in a discussion on what they have learned from each other.

EXAMPLES: *1776* by David McCullough, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* by Alison Weir, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* by Antonia Fraser, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* by Cokie Roberts.

Poetry

GRADE LEVELS: 7

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Critical reading skills and engaging with poetry

TYPE OF IDEA: Exercise

READ/THINK/WONDER

PURPOSE: To get students to not just read poetry, but to engage with it and ask questions.

1. Hand out a poem, such as Mark Strand's "Eating Poetry," to students along with a Read/Think/Wonder graphic organizer.
2. Read the poem aloud to students so that they can hear the way the poem is meant to sound.
3. Students will read the poem a second time to themselves.
4. As students read, they will fill out the Read/Think/Wonder guide. For example:

What I Read:

- A. The poet has eaten poems.
- B. The dogs are on the basement stairs.
- C. I lick her hand.

What I Think:

- A. I don't think he has really "eaten" them.
- B. This is a little scary.
- C. Did he turn into a dog?

What I Wonder:

- A. I wonder why that would make a librarian upset.
- B. I wonder why the dogs are introduced.
- C. I wonder what is real and what is meant to be shocking or surprising?

5. Have students read the poem a final time.
6. Lead the class in a discussion, asking the following questions:
 - A. What did you like about the poem?
 - B. Which words or phrases did you like?
 - C. What words or phrases need clarification?
 - D. What surprised you?

E. What do you think the poem is about?

F. What might this poem be saying?

EXAMPLES: Mark Strand's "Eating Poetry" would work well with this exercise. Other poems to use could include "The Day Lady Day Died" by Frank O'Hara, "I, Too, Sing America" by Langston Hughes, or "Out, Out –" by Robert Frost.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Exploring imagery in poetry

TYPE OF IDEA: Learning Center

POETRY SKETCH

PURPOSE: To have students respond to imagery in poetry in a creative way

1. Select five poems that are imagery-rich.
2. Create five different learning centers in a classroom by placing copies of a poem, blank paper, and crayons, markers or colored pencils at five different tables.
3. Break students into groups and start each group at a different learning center.
4. At each center, one student will read the poem aloud to the other students as they also read on their own from copies.
5. Students will spend three minutes after the poem has been read sketching out the imagery from the poem that is most interesting to them or that stands out to them the most.
6. At the end of three minutes, students will move on to the next center and repeat the activities until each group has been to each center.
7. As a group, students will read each poem again and discuss what they drew and why.
8. For each poem, the groups will answer the following questions:
 - A. What imagery in the poetry was drawn the most? Why?
 - B. Were there any images that inspired very different or contrasting drawings? Why do you think this is?
 - C. Were the drawings literal depictions of the imagery, or were some more abstract?
9. After the groups have answered the questions, discuss them as a class and ask students to draw some conclusions about imagery in poetry.

EXAMPLES: “I Will Wade Out” by e.e. cummings, “After Apple-Picking” by Robert Frost, “My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke, “Preludes” by T.S. Eliot.

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Exploring simile in poetry

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity

COLLABORATIVE POETRY

PURPOSE: To introduce students to the concept of similes and how they are used in poetry.

1. Read aloud to the class a few poems that use simile, such as Robert Burns' "A Red, Red Rose," and "A Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes.
2. Explain the concept of a simile and have students identify the ones used in the poems that were read.
3. Ask students for examples of similes in popular music to get them thinking about how they are used outside of poetry.
4. Prior to class, write down on index cards a variety of nouns, both common and proper.

For example: sunshine, a cat, Michigan, steak.

5. Pass out one index card to each student.
6. Ask the class for a subject for a poem. Subjects could include: love, school, or adolescence.
7. Each student will use his or her index card to write a simile for the subject.

For example, a student who drew the card "steak" and is writing on the theme "school" might write, "School is like steak, better on occasion than every day."

8. Allow students ten minutes to come up with a few similes for their nouns and to select their best one.
9. Compile the entire class's similes to create one poem on the chosen subject.
10. Repeat the activity a few times so that students get comfortable creating similes.
11. Pass out four of five noun cards to each student and have them write a poem on a subject of their own choosing, creating one simile per noun.
12. Once all the poems are complete, they can be compiled in a book so that students can share their work.

EXAMPLES: “A Red, Red Rose” by Robert Burns, “A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes, “Flint” by Christina Rossetti, “I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud” by William Woodsworth.

GRADE LEVELS: 10

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Appreciating and writing about poetry

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

POETRY COLLECTIONS

PURPOSE: To encourage students to find poetry they enjoy and to write about and recommend poetry to others.

1. At the end of a unit on poetry, ask students to find ten to fifteen poems that they truly like and would recommend to others.
2. The poems can be gathered from those read in class, from anthologies in a classroom or school library, or from searching the Internet. Allow students time in class to peruse these various sources.
3. Once the poems have been selected, students will write a paragraph for each poem, explaining:
 - A. Why the poem was selected.
 - B. How the student feels about the poem or why it is important to him or her.
 - C. Any personal insight the student has on the poem.
 - D. Why other people may like the poem.
4. Students will also write a “Foreword” for their collection, explaining:
 - A. How they went about selecting the poems.
 - B. Any common themes or trends within the collection.
 - C. What readers can gain from reading the collection.
 - D. What they learned about themselves and poetry during the unit and the creation of the collection.
5. Students will add artistic elements to the poems, such as drawings, photography or other images.
6. Each students’ collection will be printed and can be added to a classroom or school library.

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Identifying themes in poetry

TYPE OF IDEA: Game

MUSIC MATCH UP

PURPOSE: To have students identify themes in poetry by creating a game out of matching music to poems.

1. In class, have the class read four poems that deal with different themes.

For example, themes could include: unrequited love, war, or loss of innocence.

2. Discuss the themes as a class and come to an agreement on what the themes are.

3. Assign each student one of the four poems without letting others know which one each student has.

4. Give students two days to find a song that deals with the same theme as their poem.

5. Have students hand in the poem, title of the song and a CD or link to where the song can be found online.

6. Play each song during class and have students write down whether they think the song corresponds to Poem A, Poem B, Poem C or Poem D.

7. Once all songs have been played, go over each song selection and discuss as a class what theme it represents. The student who selected the song can be asked to defend their selection.

8. Once all songs have been discussed, the student(s) with the most correct answers receives a prize.

9. Students may also vote on other prizes, such as Most Accurate Selection, Most Creative Selection, Most Obscure Selection, etc...

9. As a follow up activity, students can further analyze their music selections by writing a short essay on how and why they selected the song and how the theme is represented in the song.

EXAMPLES: “I Explain A Few Things” by Pablo Neruda, “The December Rose” by Edith Nesbit, “The Bells” by Edgar Allen Poe, “Hope” by Emily Dickinson.

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Writing and responding to poetry

TYPE OF IDEA: Bulletin Board

POET/ARTIST

PURPOSE: To encourage students to write poetry and to get comfortable responding to it in different ways.

1. Ask for two student volunteers, one to be a Poet and one to be an Artist.
2. Provide each of the two students a day or two to write an original poem (Poet) or create an original piece of art (Artist.)
2. On one bulletin board or poster board, have the Poet place his or her poem and on another bulletin board or poster board, have the Artist place his or her piece of art.
3. Throughout the week, students will respond to both the Poet and the Artist. For the Poet, students will create a drawing that represents the poem and post it on the board. For the Artist, students will write a poem that represents the piece of art and post it on the board.
4. Once all students have submitted both their poem and their piece of art, let the Poet and the Artist lead the class in a discussion about their work. They may choose to discuss:
 - A. What inspired them to create their poem or piece of art.
 - B. Which response piece they think best represents their original work.
 - C. Which response piece is the most creative representation of their original work.
5. Lead the class in a discussion on the differences and similarities between poetry and visual art. Some questions to ask may include:
 - A. How is theme represented in poetry versus visual art?
 - B. How is mood or setting represented in poetry versus visual art?
 - C. How do you tell a story with visual art?
 - D. How do you create an image with poetry?

Short Story

GRADE LEVELS: 8

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Reading comprehension of short stories and study of a single author

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

DOODLE SPLASH

PURPOSE: To help students discern setting, plot, character, point of view and theme, as well as to study the work of a single author, by working individually and collaboratively to illustrate these elements in a short story.

1. Provide students with a choice of 4 or 5 short stories by the same author and let students select which one they would like to read. Encourage 4 or 5 students to select each story so that groups have somewhat even numbers.
2. Hand out a short story and blank pieces of paper to each student.
3. Pass out Doodle Splash instruction handout and read over the instructions with students.
4. As students read, they will create doodles on the pieces of blank paper that represent the elements of a short story:
 - A. setting
 - B. plot
 - C. character
 - D. point of view
 - E. theme
5. Once students are done reading and doodling, they will meet in their groups and share their doodles with each other.
6. Pass out large pieces of paper (poster board or butcher paper) and markers, crayons or colored pencils.
7. Students will select which doodles best represent the short story and will together replicate the doodles on the large pieces of paper using the markers, crayons or colored pencils. Students should include the title of the short story on the paper.
8. Students will present their work to the rest of the class, making sure to highlight the five elements of a short story. The rest of the students will take notes while the other groups present.
9. Hang up the finished doodles so everyone can view them.
10. Lead the class in a discussion on commonalities and differences among the stories. Questions to ask may include:

- A. What are some common themes among [Author's] work?
- B. Are there common settings among [Author's work]?
- C. Do any of [Author's] characters remind you of his/her other characters?

EXAMPLES: *Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe* by Edgar Allen Poe, *Bradbury Stories: 100 of His Most Celebrated Tales* by Ray Bradbury, *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* by Ernest Hemingay, *Complete Short Stories of Jack London* by Jack London.

GRADE LEVELS: 7

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Understanding character, plot and voice

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity (After-Reading)

LITERATURE LETTERS – “THE LOTTERY”

PURPOSE: To have students demonstrate knowledge of character, plot and voice in the short story “The Lottery.”

1. After reading Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” break students into pairs and assign each pair two characters from the story. The characters may be assigned to more than one pair.
2. Students will write two letters, one from Character A to Character B and one from Character B to Character A.
3. Before writing, students will decide whether the letters will be written prior to the events that take place in the short story or after the events take place in the short story.
4. After the time of the letters has been established, students will work in their pairs to answer the following questions:
 - A. What words describe Character A? What words describe Character B?
 - B. What does Character A do within “The Lottery?” What does Character B do within “The Lottery?”
 - C. How does Character A interact with or feel about Character B? How does Character B interact with or feel about Character A?
 - D. How does Character A change from the beginning of “The Lottery” to the end of the story? How does Character B change from the beginning of “The Lottery” to the end of the story?
 - E. If Character A could say anything to Character B, what would it be? If Character B could say anything to Character A, what would it be?
 - F. What do you think Character A did the day before the Lottery took place? The day after? What do you think Character B did the day before the Lottery took place? The day after?

5. After the pairs have answered the pre-writing questions, they will use their answers to write letters from Character A to Character B and Character B to Character A. The letters should show evidence of:

A. Attention to plot details

B. Attention to character and voice

C. Creativity

6. After the letters are written, the pairs will read the letters aloud to the entire class.

7. The class and teacher can ask the letter writers questions about their choices in writing the letters. Students should be able, with the help of their pre-writing answers, to support their decisions.

EXAMPLES: Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" or any other short story with a variety of characters.

GRADE LEVELS: 6

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Understanding the short story, theme

TYPE OF IDEA: Activity

NAME THAT STORY

PURPOSE: To help students understand the importance of titles and how they represent a short story.

1. Ask students why a title might be important for a short story. Answers may include:
 - A. To get the reader's interest
 - B. To keep stories organized
 - C. To explain what the story is about
2. Read aloud to the class the titles only of some short stories. After reading each title, ask students:
 - A. What do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?
 - B. What kind of story do you think this is (romance, mystery, adventure, etc...)?
 - C. When do you think this story was written?
 - D. Would you read this story based off of the title alone?
3. Next, distribute a short story to students, such as Frank O'Connor's "First Confession," but do not include the title or author.
4. Read the story aloud to the class.
5. Afterward, ask students what they would title the short story. Write down the answers on a blackboard or chalkboard along with a brief explanation for each title (such as a character's name, an event in the story, a theme, or a phrase from the story).
6. Have the class discuss which of the suggested titles would make them most likely to read the story and which would make them least likely to read the story.
7. Again ask students why a title might be important for a short story, considering the discussion that just took place.
8. Reveal the title of the short story to the class and ask students:

- A. Does the title surprise you?
- B. Would you have read the story based on just the title?
- C. Do you think it is a fitting title? Why or why not?
- D. What does this title mean?

9. Ask students one more time why a title might be important, considering both discussions that took place previously.

EXAMPLES: “First Confession” by Frank O’Connor, “All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury, “To Build A Fire” by Jack London, “The Moustache” by Robert Courmier.

GRADE LEVELS: 10

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Reading comprehension and comparison of narrative and expository writing

TYPE OF IDEA: Lesson Idea

FRONT PAGE NEWS – “THE DESTRUCTORS”

PURPOSE: For students to demonstrate understanding of a short story and to examine the similarities and differences between narrative and expository writing

1. After reading Graham Greene’s “The Destructors,” hand out some recent news articles, preferably reports on crime, and have students read them in groups of 3 and 4
2. Have the groups discuss and list what they think are the important elements of a news story.
3. Discuss these elements with the class and highlight the importance of the “5Ws and How” in news writing: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.
4. Explain to students that they will be re-writing “The Destructors” as a news article.
5. In the groups of 3 or 4, students will use the short story to answer:
 - A. Who the characters involved in the story are and how they would be described by a news writer.
 - B. What happened in the short story that would be reported on in the news.
 - C. Where the reported events took place.
 - D. When the reported events took place.
 - E. Why the characters were motivated to do what they did.
 - F. How the characters went about their actions.
6. Once the groups have answered the questions, they will write a news article using the five questions and answers.
7. Once completed, the groups will answer the following questions in a reflection:
 - A. What are the differences between the short story and the news article you wrote?
 - B. What are the similarities?
 - C. What can a short story or narrative fiction convey that a news article cannot?

D. What can a news article convey that a short story or narrative fiction cannot?

EXAMPLES: Graham Greene's "The Destroyers" or any short story that focuses on a criminal or newsworthy activity.

GRADE LEVELS: 9

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Reading Skills and Habits

TYPE OF IDEA: Bulletin Board

“FIND YOUR NEXT READ” BULLETIN BOARD

PURPOSE: To use short stories read in class as a springboard for independent reading by showing students other stories that may interest them.

1. After a short story unit in which students have read 3-5 short stories, place attractive images of the short stories (titles and authors and a relevant illustration) on a bulletin board.
2. Find 3 additional short stories for each of the original stories that are similar in theme, topic, or character to the originals.
3. Write or type the titles and authors of the additional short stories on small pieces of paper. Do this ten times for each story.
4. Staple the 10 additional short story pieces of paper on top of each other, like a notepad, so that students can tear off a piece of paper with the story recommendation and take the paper with them to the bookstore, library, or to search on the Internet. Each “notepad” will contain only the titles of one story, so there will 9-15 “notepads” in total.
5. Attach the “notepads” to the bulletin board, placing each one close to the original short story it relates to.
6. Draw arrows from the original stories to the corresponding additional stories and add text that will show students why they may like the additional stories.

For example, text could read:

“If you liked ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ by Edgar Allen Poe for its suspense, you should read ‘The Landlady’ by Roald Dahl.”

7. Introduce the board to students and set up an incentive to read these additional short stories, such as extra credit or as part of a book club.

EXAMPLES:

“The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allen Poe could lead students to “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl, “The Monkey’s Paw” by W.W. Jacobs, and “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell.

GRADE LEVELS: 10

EMPHASIS/SKILL: Main ideas, plot, theme

TYPE OF IDEA: Project

COMIC ARTIST

PURPOSE: To have students demonstrate understanding of a short story's main ideas, themes and plot by creating a comic.

1. Have students select a short story from a list of approved books.
2. Have students read their short stories in class and respond to the following questions:
 - A. Who are the main characters in this story?
 - B. What happens in this story?
 - C. What are some themes you see represented in this story?
 - D. What is this story trying to say?
3. After students have responded to the questions in number 2, have them browse through a variety of graphic novels and comic books.
4. Have students answer the following questions:
 - A. How is a graphic novel or comic different from a short story?
 - B. What is the importance of illustration in a comic or graphic novel?
 - C. What type of text appears in a comic or graphic novel? How is thinking expressed? Speaking? Narration?
 - D. What is the purpose of panels in a graphic novel or comic?
5. Explain to students that they will be creating their own one or two page comic for the short story they read. Have them outline what events will be depicted in:
 - A. Illustration
 - B. Narration
 - C. Thought bubbles

D. Speech bubbles

6. After outlining, students will draft and receive feedback from peers on changes to make.
7. Once students have a finished product, combine all of the comics into one book. Photocopy the book and distribute to students so that they may read each other's work.

EXAMPLES: "A&P" by John Updike, "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allen Poe, "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant.