

**Title of Session: Language Arts - Vocabulary Building**

**Moderator: Donna Hendry**

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Room: ASO

DonnaH: We always start with introductions...for few reasons...so I can help you better, and it helps foster a sense of community (though you all obviously know each other!)

JaniceGuest1: But we don't know you

DonnaH: My name is Donna Hendry, and I'm the session leader for the LA Forum. I've been with Tapped In for stops and counts Nearly 4 years. I'm an educational consultant (and currently gifted middle grades English teacher) in CT

JaniceGuest1: Julie and I teach together and are going on a field trip with 85 6th graders tomorrow to the woods.

MaryWr: I teach fourth grade integrated in Haverhill, MA.

DonnaH: And where are these woods? grin

JulieB: I am Julie Buchanan, a 6th grade teacher. We are actually all in the same technology class and we are on a mission to check all of this out

JaniceGuest1: They are in Dunstable, Mass. A YMCA Camp and we unfortunately are not going with too many gifted.

DonnaH: Its okay...2 of my last 3 years have been teaching self contained SED...

JaniceGuest1: How often do you lead these chats

DonnaH: I lead the LA forum twice monthly (1st and 3rd Wed's) and I lead the Technology in the classroom sessions twice monthly on Mondays (2nd and 4th)

JulieB: so how do they work?

JaniceGuest1: Are we in a language arts forum Donna

DonnaH: Yes you are Janice:)

DonnaH: Forums work differently:) Mine tend to be teacher led investigations...but are very informal.

DonnaH: Some forums are much more informal...while others expect you to share resources as well:)

DonnaH: With the LA forum, I usually don't come in with a SET topic...invariably, I'll set one that is more HS geared, and end up with a group of almost all elem teachers or vice versa.

DonnaH: Which is why I say it helps me help you to do the introduction:)

JulieB: so what will we start with tonight?

JaniceGuest1: Maybe you have an idea how our 6th grade could arrange 144 kids including sped kids with one sped teacher and 4 mainstream teachers so all the 20 sped students can get serviced. I know this is a little much for 15 minutes but thought it wouldn't hurt to ask Ha Ha

DonnaH: is there anything specific you wish you had more info on, more resources?

DonnaH: snickers

DonnaH: the next question, Janice is, if I figure out a way....would they actually listen??

JulieB: I would like some resources on how to get the kids to be really great writers--okay..just good writers

DonnaH: chuckles

JaniceGuest1: You are so right as we have already presented a proposal and the powers that be didn't like it.

JaniceGuest1: I will go with good writers also. Good topic

DonnaH: "does mass have the same writing direction as CT?"

JulieB: Direction????

JaniceGuest1: Good question

MaryWr: Not sure

DonnaH: (6th grade= persuasive writing?)

JulieB: where we are it is a free for all

JaniceGuest1: That would be good.

DonnaH: Or we could cover expository...

JaniceGuest1: I am not sure I teach them to be better writers just to tell what is on their minds.

DonnaH: (yes, I have resources and concepts for both)

JulieB: I just feel that there is so much to focus on I am not getting anything across strongly

JaniceGuest1: I agree

DonnaH: So, we need to work on focus. maybe basics that need to be for any sort of writing?

JulieB: sounds good

DonnaH: I find the two biggest problems for students and writing is poor word choice (you can only use "good" so many times) and organization.

DonnaH: Sound fair enough so far?

MaryWr: I find the same thing.

DonnaH: I stole this idea from *MY* sophomore English teacher...

JulieB: Not only that, we have the second language issue so how do we deal with that without discouraging the kids

DonnaH: I start each class with notes. (i live in Willimantic...we have a VERY large Spanish population)

DonnaH: these notes consist of a DOL type exercise, an analogy, quote (big thoughts, not nec from reading) and one word; but listed as syn and ant...

DonnaH: so...my board might say Syn: shy-bashful, quiet, antisocial

DonnaH: ant: shy-extrovert, outgoing, social

DonnaH: As a class, we discuss, and add more words to it.

DonnaH: Another idea I've used with great success is making "overworked word" posters.

DonnaH: Usually, I've done this as a center...though it could be whole class.

DonnaH: file cards have an "overworked word" (and I really build it up...these words are SOOO tired...they call in their relatives to help out...) they have to list synonyms large enough to see from their seat...

JulieB: good ideas--I could see the kids getting into it and really using the better words

DonnaH: and once they are done, post them around the room, (words like good, like, bad, hot etc)

DonnaH: and once they are up...its not such a fuss to look for a better word, rather than having to get a thesaurus (which in some cases is either a. too much work...or b. could be considered embarrassing)

JaniceGuest1: Donna I really think your ideas will help in my class. Thanks for your help

JulieB: I am going to try this Friday for a quick writing warm up activity

DonnaH: "hello James:) Can I help you, or are you here for the LA forum?

DonnaH smiles\*

DonnaH: I found this great game in a book once, but would be easy enough to duplicate...

JulieB: Thanks for your ideas Donna...I will be back for another forum!

JamesBP: I'm a new member and would like to observe your meeting if you don't mind

MaryWr: Donna, do your students copy down your syn/ant everyday?

DonnaH: usually. it takes about 10 minutes.

DonnaH: I don't give them if we have a test

MaryWr: Do they keep them in a notebook?

DonnaH: yep:)

MaryWr: Do you find that they use that as a reference when they are writing?

DonnaH: its gotten to the point, the students are asking if we can use a specific quote they like (we discuss the quote's meaning...they are to write what it makes them think) or if we can use a specific word in the syn/ant

DonnaH: actually, because we discuss (and I imagine because of the students I have at the moment) they are remembering the words.

DonnaH: but I AM seeing them in their writing.

DonnaH: Obviously, we're discussing how to make writing better, James:)

DonnaH: feel free to pop in with any questions or comments as they come:) we're pretty informal here:)

JamesBP: What age are the students?

DonnaH: The students I have right now are 5-8

DonnaH: but I've used this with 4th graders, right up to 12 grade.

JamesBP: I teach 12th grade electrical shop

MaryWr: That is my issue.....I really focused on vocab this year. I went beyond what is in our reading series. I found that my kids love to recall the words when we are talking or trying to list syn/ant, but only a few consistently use the words in their writing.

DonnaH: In a Voc Tech school? or in a regular HS?

JamesBP: I would like my students to write more often

JamesBP: In a technical high school

DonnaH: The poster concept might help then...when I was teaching the SED students, (who are NOT well motivated) doing the notes didn't help their writing as much until we did the posters.

DonnaH: I really think part of it is this sorta of intellectual macho-ism ("I don't need a thesaurus!")

DonnaH: when it's on the walls, they can look much more circumspectly.

DonnaH nods toward James

MaryWr: I think you are right. I will give the posters a try.

DonnaH: I would guess the problem you have more, James, is students' organization?

JamesBP: I find notebooks work really well

DonnaH: chuckles Actually, James, I meant within their writing:) not physically

DonnaH: organization of Ideas and such.

MaryWr: Any tips on organization, Donna?

DonnaH: I had a student just a few weeks ago, who was doing VERY poorly in writing. I spoke with his mom, who mentioned he was a science freak (i mean that nicely)

DonnaH: "I started to think about how to make a paper organization make sense to him...

DonnaH: Writing a paper is like conducting a science experiment.

DonnaH: You're introduction is your hypothesis.

DonnaH: Your three points are your tests to prove your hypothesis.

DonnaH: (what are the tests? (quotes from the book perhaps, or other quotable information) and WHY it supports your hypothesis)

DonnaH: the conclusion is your theory...

DonnaH: Does this make sense to everyone?

DonnaH: (you would be amazed at the difference in his writing)

MaryWr: Makes sense to me.

DonnaH: the other trick I've taught my students is...write the body first. (the three main points) THEN write the intro.

JamesBP: How about using open ended questions?

DonnaH: The analogy I used was how can you introduce a person, if you know nothing about them?

DonnaH: How do you mean, James?

DonnaH: I've seen the introductions become much stronger in their rough drafts since I've had them try that.

MaryWr: We focus heavily on writing personal narratives in the fourth grade. Our MCAS long comp is always a personal narrative. I do have my kids write the body first. That does help.....

DonnaH: You'd be surprised how many people simply haven't thought of that. (you're the first person I've mentioned it to who has actually done it)

MaryWr: It makes sense too. The intro is often the hardest part.

DonnaH: Especially if they are doing any sort of research.

DonnaH: Which is the last thing I really teach...

DonnaH: I like outlines. I usually include them in the rubric, so they know they are important.

DonnaH: For my really poor writers, I've constructed a fill in the blank outline

DonnaH: The three parts would have the areas (say we're writing on pets)

MaryWr: I haven't tried outlines with my kids. We usually start with some type of graphic organizer, though.

DonnaH: so I. Intro, II Dogs, III Cats IV Fish V conclusion.

MaryWr: A fill in the blank outline.....good idea!

DonnaH: well, under dogs, I would have a quote: This is important because instead of writing the paper, then trying to find quotes to fit, find the quotes, and write around them.

DonnaH: if you explain why the quote is important, you're writing your paper.

DonnaH: So they would know, they needed to find 9 quotes for the body then explain them.

MaryWr: I like it! I think that my kids could do it.....

DonnaH: it breaks it down into steps they can understand, and they can follow.

DonnaH: first research papers where they have to actually quote material tends to freak them out.

DonnaH: I had students a bit older write a comparative literature paper using this...

KarenL nods in agreement.

DonnaH: and they wrote better papers than the English class I TA'd for in college (and these were my SED students)

MaryWr: That's great!

DonnaH: and...it's also an automatic check...if they can't explain why the quote is important, it's not a good quote for their paper...and they don't waste time.

DonnaH: The problem is, you need to write the outline as a class.

DonnaH: (because you need the topics outlined prior to)

DonnaH: but, if it's the first time they've worked with outlines, that isn't necessarily a bad thing.

MaryWr: No, that would be a VERY GOOD thing!

DonnaH: Actually, now that I think about it...my eighth graders are about to read Jekyll and Hyde after reading Lord of the Flies...perhaps I'll make them do that laugh

DonnaH: (good comparative lit!)

MaryWr: Great idea!

MaryWr: We're reading Skinnybones right now. A far cry from Lord of the Flies! LOL

DonnaH: I have to admit, for myself, I'm not fond of webs, except as brainstorming...students don't realize that webs are not organized.

DonnaH: (haven't read it) my 5th graders are reading The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

DonnaH: (they're creating games in groups this week)

DonnaH: sequence and events

MaryWr: Funny book....very high interest for this time of year.

DonnaH: Something that might work for Narrative that I've been doing with my 6th graders....

DonnaH: We're reading "Warriors Don't Cry" (written by one of the original Little Rock 9) during the year of integration.

DonnaH: It's a memoir (they are reading an abridged version...but very high interest)

DonnaH: I bought a journal...and each night, a student brings it home, and writes an entry in character.

MaryWr: Sounds great! What is the reading level of the book?

DonnaH: we spent some time as a class deciding on basic facts (who the character was, who was in her family, what classes she had etc)

DonnaH: Word wise, I think a 5th grader could read it...subject wise...there are a few curses in it, and the word nigger is all over (realize the topic)

DonnaH: it's very edgy.

DonnaH: (not my choice...but I like it.)

DonnaH: The 6th graders have been studying the 60's so this fits into the civil rights movement.

KarenL: Who decided that particular book?

DonnaH: Not entirely sure (I'm in these classes as a long term sub...) I was given the choice between this and the book "red scarf girl"

DonnaH: its possible to, since these are the gifted students, that they are given a bit more leeway...I'm not certain.

DonnaH: I would have no qualms about reading it in hs though.

KarenL: Oh, I see. I'm trying to think of another book that might have been better. Ruby Bridges but that would have been too easy for them. It's a picture book.

DonnaH: Roll of Thunder they do in 4th grade...

KarenL: Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963?

DonnaH: I can think of a few...but this book *IS* a good book.

KarenL: Yes, I know. And it is an excellent choice for civil rights.

DonnaH: I don't tend to shy from controversial books...because I think it makes them see what the other side was really like, instead of trying to clean it up.

KarenL: But your idea of doing the decades appeal to me. And I'm thinking of some books that might fit within each decade.

DonnaH: But, that being said, I don't want to say , "yes, have your students read it" and have you end up in trouble because I didn't warn grin

DonnaH: It is an interesting idea, Karen.

KarenL: Oh, I know.

DonnaH: but the 6th graders are sick of it laugh

KarenL: How long did you spend on the decades?

KarenL: I suspect anything over a week might make them sick of it.

DonnaH: the problem with this book has been keeping them back...they want to keep reading ahead.

KarenL: That's a good thing, right?

KarenL: They are interested in reading and that is a giant step!

DonnaH: no, this has been a LONG term study...cross curricular...I'd be guessing, but I'd say 3 months or so.

MaryWr: Donna, you've been very helpful. I will certainly try some of your suggestions. I'm going to say good-bye now. Thank you very much!

KarenL: Okay. Would you recommend that amount of time on a decade.

DonnaH: "thanks for coming, Mary:)"

DonnaH: I couldn't say Karen:)"

DonnaH: I landed in this position chuckl

MaryWr: Thank you!

KarenL: Oh I see.

DonnaH: but, its gifted classes:)"

KarenL: I was discussing a similar idea with our Social Studies teacher and he liked the idea as well. I was going to try to get the music and art teacher involved, too.

DonnaH: that would be incredibly cool:)"

KarenL: Okay. Well, that might make a difference too.

DonnaH: i've been integrating music into the 6th grade study especially.

KarenL: Our students are regular students. They have the "gift" to gab!

DonnaH: since they've been doing the 60's...they don't all have background prior to...

DonnaH: so I had them listen to Billie holiday's "Strange Fruit"

KarenL: Ooh, really good choice!

DonnaH: I got an mp3 file offline...it really freaked them out.

KarenL: OOOh!

DonnaH: (I also gave them the lyrics)

KarenL: Oooh!

DonnaH: but it was a definite wake up call.

KarenL: I am sure it was.

DonnaH: we look back now, and don't understand how bad it was then...it really helped set it up.

DonnaH: (and if I can say that, when mixed marriages were still frowned on when I was a kid, I can imagine what its like now, when the line is blurred even more)

KarenL: So true. Because I lived in the North, and my parents sheltered me from this, I really got a rude awakening myself.

DonnaH: I also had them do a debate, so they could see where the segregationists stood...

DonnaH: not everyone wanted segregation because they were evil rednecks.

DonnaH: which is what is hard for them to understand.

KarenL: Ooh, another good idea.

DonnaH: we debated on whether or not to integrate Central high school

KarenL: OOOh, and the decision was. . .

DonnaH: we didn't make a decision.

DonnaH: they asked who won...

KarenL: hmmm. . .

DonnaH: I made them do a very formal debate.

DonnaH: (I was also doing it for form...3 minute point, 1 minute rebuttal)

DonnaH: I knew it could collapse into a shouting match...which is NOT debating.

KarenL: Ooh, I could see that too.

DonnaH: which is part of the reason I refused to choose a side as a winner.

KarenL: Did you use American Memories as a resource?

DonnaH: (open a whole other can of worms)

DonnaH: They had to use the book as a resource.

KarenL: I'm sure that did. We just had a talent show and the judging opened up a can of worms.

KarenL: So any judging or decision is bound to be open for debate!

DonnaH: exactly.

DonnaH: so I told them we were doing it as an exercise, since we all knew that segregation was a social ill of the time.

KarenL: That is a very diplomatic way to handle the debate. I love it!

DonnaH chuckles

KarenL: Thanks for answering my questions on the decade project. I appreciate that.