

Using Writing Territories to Support Writing Identities and Abilities

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Priority Needs

Problem: Across all content areas, teachers in our building have formatively assessed that our students need writing support, the most central factor being their identity as writers.

Student Problem:

Students express difficulty getting started, difficulty maintaining stamina, and difficulty taking pride in their identities as writers.

Teacher Problem:

After talking to other core content teachers, we have found that the greatest detriment to growth as writers is lack of time.

Contributing Factors to Priority Needs

- ❑ Prior to this academic school year, we taught reading and writing standards in the same language arts class at each grade level. As we do have many novice and apprentice readers in the building, naturally much focus falls toward reading instruction and strategies. Therefore, lack of time allocated for writing is a contributing factor to our need for a stricter focus on building writers' identities.
- ❑ The Covid-19 shut down at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, in addition to typical summer learning loss, heightened our need for ample and strategic time to support writing identities in the 2020-2021 school year.
- ❑ Our school's improvement plan centers around a push for literacy; naturally, most focus has been placed on reading. School-wide, we have implemented book talks, free book fairs, reading choice during class time, and reading reward programs. Even though writing is certainly central in literacy, we have typically focused on the reading aspect of literacy.

Objectives

We asked our principal to allow us to split the 7th grade language arts class into two classes: a reading class and a writing class. The writing class will be a semester long class. We implement this only at the 7th grade level.

With this only being at the 7th grade level, we modified our goals for the 8th grade.

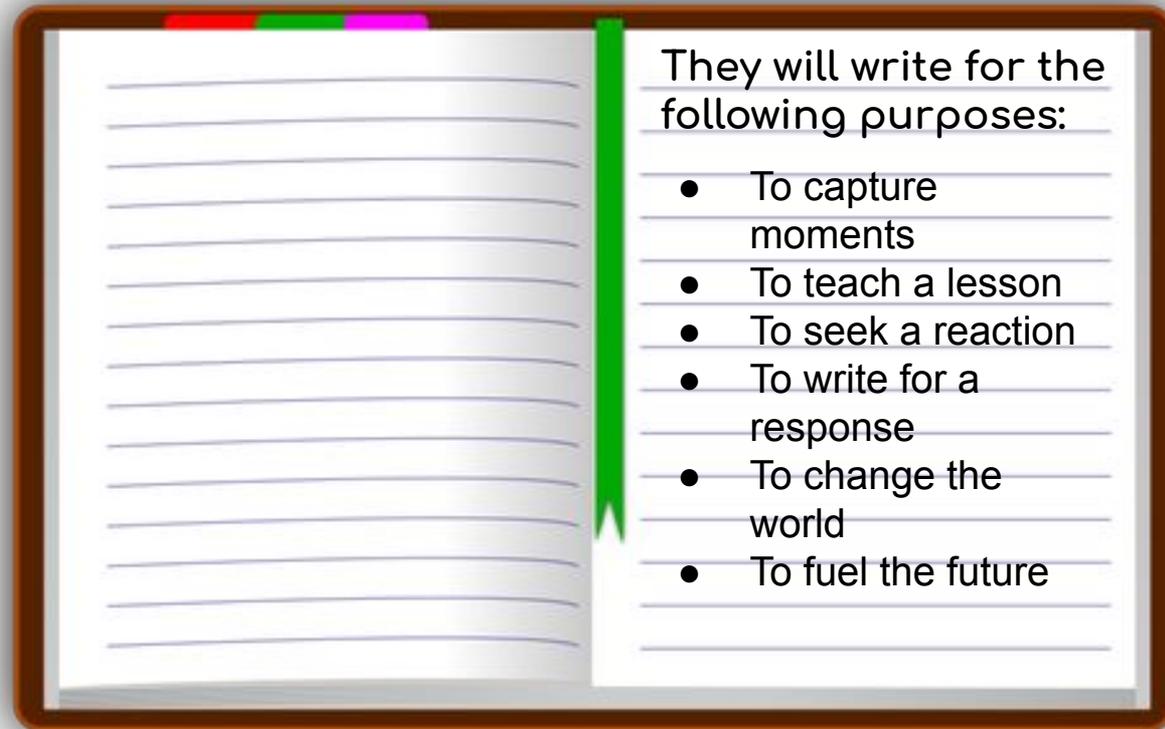
8th Grade Only:

The 8th grade teacher in our group implemented strategies to support 8th grade writing identities as well; however, time is more limited because reading standards take central priority in her class. We suspect that 8th grade students will grow in their writing identities as well.

Objectives

The intent of the strategies used this school year was to develop authentic writing territories, necessary to create space for students to grow in their writing identities and abilities.

We recognize that previously, most writing in language arts in our building was not used to support writing identities and voices, but to demonstrate reading comprehension and for analytical purposes. We will now use the 7th grade writing class as a means of developing writers' creative voices.



Goals

Student Short Term Growth Goals:

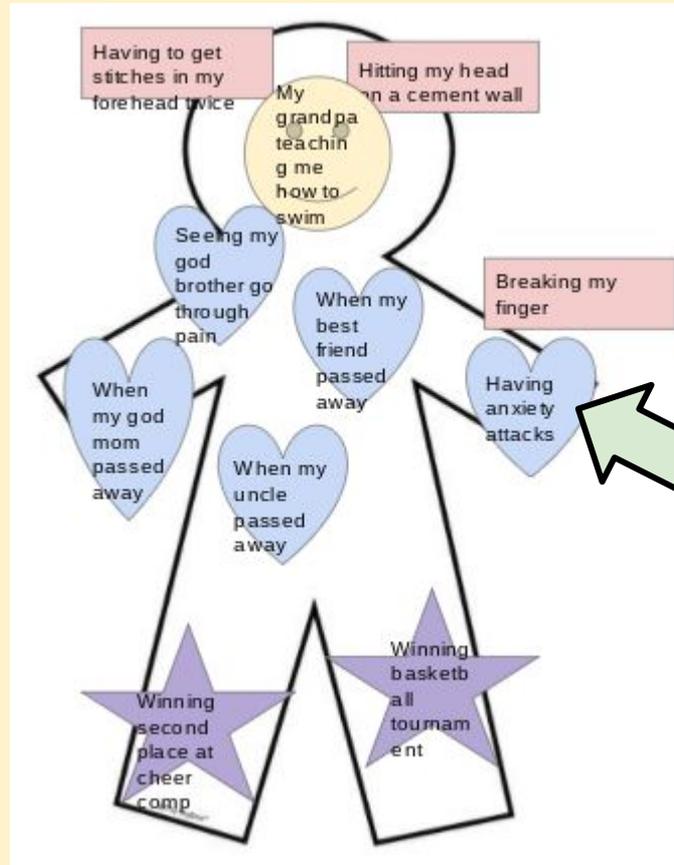
- During the 2020-2021 school year, all 7th grade students will grow in their writing identities, writing stamina, voice, and ability to recognize errors in their writing while caring enough to make changes to improve their work.
 - Source of Data: formative writing samples of 7th graders compared to this year's 8th graders; completion of writing identity survey given to 7th graders at the beginning and end of their writing class.

Student Long-Term Growth Goals:

- Over time, the 8th graders will come in with a writing background, which will allow us to spend less time on the foundations of writing and more time on improving their writing identities. This is something that we will not get to measure right away, but will hopefully see in coming years.

Strategy: Scar Map

Students drag shapes (happy faces, boxes, stars, etc) to represent physical and emotional scars. Students use these scars as writing territories from which to select topics for writing pieces throughout the semester.



Student used this territory for a writing piece on the next slide.

7th Grade Writing Piece Based on Scar Map

The time was 11:45. I was anxiously sitting down at the table with my friends. We had just walked in from lunch a few minutes ago and I could still smell whatever it was Ms. B had eaten. I looked around for my pencil, but all of a sudden everything got really cloudy. Then, out of the blue, a loud throbbing noise buzzed obtrusively through my ears making my head hurt. I held my ears, my eyes watered up, but no one else seemed to hear it. I felt nauseous and my mouth tasted pukey. I took one hand off of my ears and looked down at it. It was shaking uncontrollably. All of my friends got up and huddled around me, but they all just looked like big splotches of color. *What's going on. What is that noise,* I thought to myself. Then the noise slowly went away, but everyone's voices were echoing through my head, bouncing off of every inch of my brain as if there was a speaker in there. Ms. B was calling the office, "I need to send one of my students to the nurse."

My friends stood me up, and as I stood up everything went blank. The room was lifeless. I got dizzy and began hyperventilating. I was gasping for air. I tried to take deep breaths, but it wasn't helping. Every time I let my breath out it sounded precarious. My lips quivered and a tear ran down my cheek. My throat felt like it was closing in and my lungs felt as if they were collapsing. *What is happening to me?* It had all happened so fast I didn't know what to think. I was scared. Why did I feel like this? So many questions ran through my mind all at once that I couldn't think straight. All my thoughts were bundled into one giant cloud in my brain and they were all replaying over and over again. *What is wrong with me?* One of the counselors came rushing into the class. "It must be an anxiety attack." Think it clicked... it all made sense to me.

Scar Map Strategy Reflection

Teacher Practice	Student Achievement	Next Steps
<p>Through this activity, we were able to emphasize that experiences stick with us like scars, and that these places are where we should go when reaching for a topic that means something to us, so that it matters to our audience as well.</p>	<p>Students used their scar map to consider writing topics, and some drafted meaningful stories based on territories from their scar maps.</p>	<p>A logical step to extend this activity would be for students to use these territories from the scar map for choice writing. We used the scar maps to assist with expanded moment and narrative writing, but students could also use their maps for poems or other genres of choice writing.</p>

Strategy: Memory Matching

Moment Matching: Choose 4 images from the cards below. Match each image with a happy or positive moment from your life. The more specific the moment the better! Add as many details as you can remember!



This reminds me of when I first got my dog. My parents knocked for me to come out of my room and I come out to my grandma standing at the door with a little puppy next to her. When I asked about whos puppy it was they said it was mine.



This reminds me of when I first held my little brother.



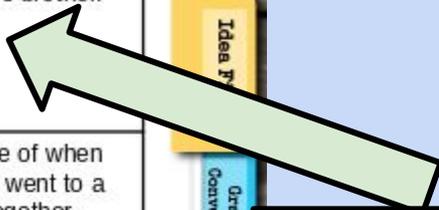
This reminds me of when me and my dad went to a football game together. When we were there we had a lot of laughs.



This reminds me of the last Thanksgiving, I remember that I never ate the Thanksgiving my parents made later, but at my grandmas I have. So when I finally my parents food it was a lot better in my opinion.



This reminds me of this past Christmas when my brother was excited to see me that morning. When I sat down and started opening presents he was smiling then ran over to open them with me.



Student used this territory for a writing piece on the next slide.

Idea P

Grammar Conventions

Root Words

Power Words

Journal

7th Grade Writing Piece Based on Memory Matching

One foggy September ago, I had a little brother that we had been wanting for so long. I looked up from my phone and my dad asked with a smile, "You ready to hold him?" I smiled back and quietly answered, "Yes." Then, I saw my dad turn and start walking towards me, step by step, quietly and carefully. My dad slowly started leaning over to gently lay my, now new, brother into my arms. I felt the brown cloth hospital chair beneath me as I prepared to hold my brother for the first time. I could feel his breathing in my arms as I cradled him in his slumber. The smell of everything came lingering back to me. The lotion, hand sanitizer, and that cold, clear air flowing through my nose. I thought to myself, *I can't wait to see him grow up in this world, and see how he is like.* Finally, as my final thoughts to myself were almost done, I said, "Well here he is Dom... your little best friend, Adonis."

Memory Matching Strategy Reflection

Teacher Practice	Student Achievement	Next Steps
<p>After students filled out the Scar Map, we realized that some students were choosing to write about their negative experiences in life. While some students found this therapeutic, some students were opening trauma wounds that were not helping them grow as writers because the writing became painful for them. Through the moment matching activity, we were able to emphasize that we all have positive memories worth sharing with others too, so the photos we chose tended to be happy images such as an idyllic landscape, pets, yummy meals, etc. We have emphasized to students that these moments are just as meaningful as the negative memories we may have.</p>	<p>The goal was for students to use the photos to associate happy memories worth writing about. For example, if students saw a picture of a beautiful landscape, they might associate this with a family vacation. If they saw a picture of a pumpkin, they might associate this with a holiday tradition. Students wrote down their memories associated with the pictures, so that they would always have a collection of territories from which to begin writing.</p>	<p>A logical step to extend this activity would be for students to use these territories from the moment matching for choice writing.... We used the moment matching to assist with expanded moment and narrative writing, but students could also use their maps for poems or other genres of choice writing.</p>

Strategy: Daily Journaling

Journal Entries from 8th grade student that does not have a separate reading and writing class.

If i where able to go any where in the world that i would want to i would want to go to mount everest. First of all mount everest is a huge tourist resort and it should be being the largest mountain in the world. The mountain stands above the clouds with many coulters around its base and with snow on its peak .

As you can see, as the semester went on, the students increased their writing stamina and could write more in the same time frame.

My goal is to graduate high school with a 4.0 or higher gpa and attend college somewhere far away. I would use this experience to meet a lot of new people. I would probably major in business or maybe something to do with being a doctor. Not a surgeon but maybe like a personal trainer or a sports physician. I feel like this would be a good way for me to continue my love of sports. After that I would like to travel as much of the world as I humanly can so I can see everything; the beautiful mountains, oceans, waterfalls. Forests, beaches, you get the picture. I would love to live somewhere near the beach so I could enjoy the sunrise and sunset there with my wife and kids. I want to have 2 kids, a boy and a girl.

Daily Journaling Reflection

Teacher Practice	Student Achievement	Next Steps
<p>Through this activity, we were able to emphasize the importance of writing stamina. As we gradually increase the intensity, duration, and frequency of journal writing, students can feel more comfortable with longer writing prompts and situations.</p>	<p>Students used journal writing as an outlet for their lives. They also became more comfortable writing for longer periods of time and explored different writing styles.</p>	<p>Students should continue with the routine of journaling so their writing stamina continues to grow. 8th graders are required to take the On-Demand portion of the KPREP test at the end of the year. The goal is that they can write during a specific time frame due to the practice of journaling.</p>

Strategy: Google Comments Between Teacher and Students (Grade 7)

At the beginning, my mom and I watched the little kids. It was a bunch of 6-7 year olds including my sister. I thought this dojo was insane for a bit, letting little kids be able to punch and kick each other. My sister got first place, surprisingly "She has improved," said mom. I wasn't really paying attention because I was distracted watching Youtube and eating a rice crispy treat. After the 8-10 year olds boring fight, It was showtime. There was only one other kid signed up for the older group, I expected more. I scanned the room to see if anyone could be him. I felt an immediate shock as I saw a kid not much

younger than me stand up. My belt started to cower in fear with me. If it was any normal kid I wouldn't freak out, but he was a black stripe.

 Lydia Brooks
12:57 PM Nov 16

Do you think these details are necessary to keep for your overall theme? Or do you think they are off topic? The story is about you, although you did write this well. If you want to keep it, that's fine, I just wanted to check!

 [Redacted]
11:34 AM Nov 17

I mean it is a personal narrative, but its nice to see others point of view in writing. I feel like it gives more variety than just including two people.

 Lydia Brooks
12:43 PM Nov 19

I'm glad you have been able to engage in the drafting process while getting feedback. As the author, you have artistic freedom to keep or change whatever you want! I'm also glad that you were intentional about your writing choice... saying that you think it gives more variety is a great justification. Thank

Notice:

Time carved out in a writing class for teachers to provide feedback in real time allows for students to engage with their teachers in conversations about their creative choices.

Strategy: Google Comments Between Teacher and Students (Grade 7)

You could hear the birds calling, the wind punching the leaf and the branches together, you could hear the water flowing down the stern you could hear the rock underneath our boot you could hear the fire popping and the chainsaw cutting the tree you could hear the car and the boat and the side by side motors running and I knew that that was going to be the last time went down to the lake until next year. It was kind of weird being back and seeing everything and how some stuff change but I knew there was one thing that stayed the same. As soon as we got to the camper I unload the truck and wait for my friends to show up. When they go there I was playing in the creek and they came down and said hi and everything. We had some much to talk about because we havent seen eachother in half a year. We got there kind of late so we would have to do all that in the morning. The next day I woke up and two of them were in the creek so I walked over and woke my friend up. That was my age we spent the whole weekend together. I was so happy nothing chage and that they were able to come. I knew after we left!



Lydia Brooks
9:34 AM Today



You are already doing an excellent job with sensory details.

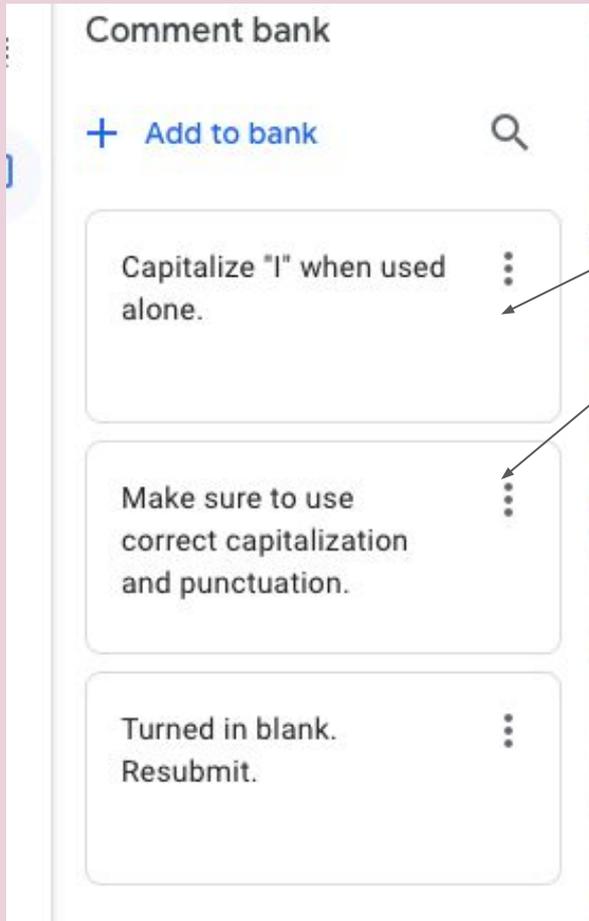
One thing I want to mention early is that you are writing in second person with "You." Is this something you want to maintain throughout the whole story? If not, I would switch it by taking out "you." For example,
The birds called and the wind punched the leave branches together. The water flowed....
OR
I could hear the birds calling...

Let me know if you need more clarification.

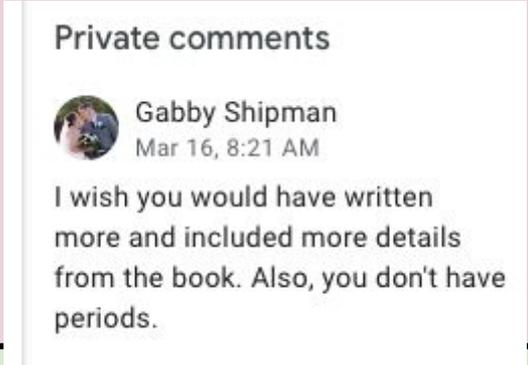
Notice:

Adequate time to help writers build their identities in class allows teachers and students to discuss more than just the foundations of writing, but the craft of writing.

Strategy: Google Comments Between Teacher and Students (Grade 8)



This is a screenshot from the 8th grade teacher's comment bank. These are the top 3 comments that she uses daily. It shows that she has to constantly remind her 8th grade students about basic grammar.



These are 8th graders who did not have a separate reading and writing class. This emphasizes our goal that over time students who have the separate reading and writing classes in 7th grade will need less time in 8th grade spent on basic writing skills. In future years, the 8th grade teachers will spend more time developing writing identities and preparing them for high school level writing.

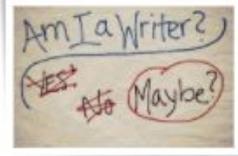
Google Comments Strategy Reflection

Teacher Practice	Student Achievement	Next Steps
<p>While students crafted writing territories, journaled, or workshopped any writing piece, we went through their work and left comments. We made suggestions, asked questions, and praised strong writing. This helped students know how their work affected their audience.</p> <p>Teachers frequently left comments expressing to students their takeaways from student writing. We often framed our comments as an audience member's perspective, not a teacher's. For example, "As your reader, I am not quite sure I understand this. I am hearing _____. As the author, is that how you intended it to come across to your reader?"</p>	<p>When students recognized that their work was actually being received by an active listener, they tended to care more about how their voice as the writer came across. We also noticed that when they noticed a teacher was viewing their document in real time, they would stop to ask a question in the comments, maybe questions they were not comfortable asking out loud. They also stopped to make edits because when they saw real eyes on their documents, they recognized that pesky errors might negatively impact the delivery of the piece. We also noticed an increase in students desiring feedback, as indicated by them actively asking for it during writing tasks.</p>	<p>Students have grown to appreciate and crave teacher feedback. Due to the natural social ramifications of sharing writing work with peers, our adolescent students do not typically desire space to share their work with their peers, especially if it is personal. We have done peer feedback through anonymous peer review, but students often do not want others to see their name. We feel that sharing writing with others is an integral part of developing writing identity; therefore, post-pandemic, we would love to spend more time cultivating an atmosphere conducive to work sharing so that students can use the comment feature to give each other feedback as well.</p>

Effectiveness of Strategies

Writing Identity Survey AT BEGINNING of Semester

Fresh Start Writing Survey



No pressure. Seriously. There is no reason to lie, fib, exaggerate, or obscure the truth. My job is to give you the tools to grow...but at the end of the year, we won't know how much you've grown unless we know what kind of shape you're in right now. Take a good hard look at yourself as a writer and be honest!

Question 1:
Highlight the response that fits best:

TODAY, August 25, 2020

- I'm a writer.
- I'm not a writer.
- I really don't know if I'm a writer

Notice:
The student initially lacked confidence in her writing abilities at the beginning of the semester. This was a trend in most students.

Question 2: Complete the Sentence

Writing is:

Writing is a form of communication for me, I'm not good with words because of anxiety so writing is easier.

Question 3: Complete the Sentence

I write best when:

Im allowed to have a rough draft, a mostly quiet place with some music helps keep me focused since i do not have a long attention span.

Question 4: Complete the Sentence

Writing is hard when:

I need to write summaries or put together something where I'm not allowed to add a lot of details. dialogue and punctuation are hard.

Question 5: Highlight all that apply
Writing in school would be better if I had:

- *Dim lighting
- *Practice
- *Quiet music
- *Freedom to choose my topic
- *Examples i could copy from
- *Freedom to move around the room
- *Topics given to me

Question 6: What are you good at as a writer? "I don't know" is not accurate. Everyone is good at *something*.

I'm good with writing more descriptive, ominous maybe, with lots of details and implications but not a lot of dialogue. I can also write informative pieces, I'm not good with fantasy or motivational writing.

Question 7: Circle all that apply
Which style(s) of writing do you like best?

- *Narrative (story)
- *Poetry
- *Research Projects
- *Book Reports
- *Anything Creative
- *Argumentative/ Persuasive

Final Questions!

What kind of writing do you do in your own life?

At home I have a lot of research pages on owls and sometimes ill research criminals. Any kind of writing you'd like to get REALLY good at?

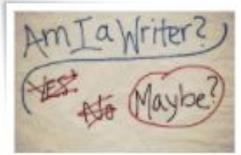
I like to get really good at legal writing (persuasive) and get better at fantasy

Question 8:

Narrative is something I struggle with.

Effectiveness of Strategies Writing Identity Survey AT END of Semester

[Redacted]'s End of the Quarter Writing Survey



And just like that, we have arrived at the end of the semester. I have thoroughly enjoyed being your Writing Plus teacher and watching you grow as writers. Before we say farewell, take a few minutes to reflect on your experiences in this class - both the positives and improvements.

Question 1:
Highlight the response that fits best:

TODAY, December 14, 2020:

- I'm a writer and I love writing!
- I'm a stronger writer than I was at the beginning of the semester.
- I'm still not a writer, but I've gotten better at writing.
- I'm still not a writer, and I haven't gotten any better at writing.

Question 2: Complete the Sentence

Writing is:

Writing is an expressive art form for me, I have bad social anxiety and sometimes speaking in front of crowds is difficult for me, writing or drawing out what I need to say is sometimes easier and more efficient.

Question 3: Complete the Sentence

Writing is still hardest when...

Writing is hard for me if I don't enjoy what I'm writing about, if I don't enjoy it I don't want to get it finished.

Question 4: Complete the Sentence

Writing is easiest when...

Writing is easiest when I enjoy or understand the topic.

Question 5: Highlight all that apply

My favorite writing unit from this class was:

- * The Foundational Unit (reading like a writer, email etiquette, grammar, etc.)
- * The Expanded Moment Unit (writing to capture a single moment of time)
- * The Personal Narrative Unit (writing to teach a lesson and share a story)
- * The Argument Unit (writing to argue respectfully and positively)

Question 6: What do you feel you have MOST improved on as a writer this semester? What skill are you taking with you that you are most proud of?

I feel that I'm better with dialogue, although I still struggle with getting an emotion across in it I feel that I am better with including it. And even though I prefer to get something across without using dialogue I at least know how to use it.

Question 7: Highlight all that apply

Which activities were most helpful?

- * Roots/Prefixes/Suffixes Activities
- * Specific Punctuation Practice
- * Reading Mentor Texts or examples from other writers
- * Digital Notebook Bell Ringers
- * Digital Notebook Graphic Organizers
- * Video Explanations

Final Questions!

What should your teacher keep next semester?

The Roman prefix and suffix work.

What should your teacher change/add/take on next semester?

There should be more journal prompts.

What overall grade would you give to your teacher this semester?

A

Notice:
The student requested more journal prompts, demonstrating enjoyment in journaling.

The majority of students expressed writing growth when given the same survey.

Conclusion(s)

- Student writing identity growth is reliant on timely, authentic feedback from teachers and peers.
- Students have diverse life experiences worthy of being shared with others. They need time to process their life experiences by exploring writing territories in order for fertile ground to exist for their words to grow.
- Splitting English Language Arts into two classes (reading and writing) is an effective method for building writing literacy. Whenever possible, this method should be used at the middle school level to support students as writers.

Challenges and Looking Forward to Next School Year

Although, in theory, splitting the 7th grade English Language Arts curriculum into a reading class and writing class gave us more time to focus on writing, Covid-19 affected our time to fully implement strategies into units. This significantly affected the 8th grade teacher, as her time for building writing identity was already limited with her reading and writing standards being covered in the same ELA class.

For much of the school year and the hybrid learning schedule, we only implemented 2 lessons per week. This caused us to need to leave out entire units and be very intentional with the time that we had in class. Judging from our successes with such limited time, we are optimistic about the potential for writing growth in a typical school year.