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Oregon Writing Project

Inquiry Question: Will Teaching Kids How to Analyze Prompts and Write Constructed Responses as Mini-Essays Help Strengthen Their Responses?

Learning Targets for Participants:

- I can understand that prompts are not just on tests in school
- I can analyze types of prompts
- I can analyze components of prompts
- I can write an effective introduction to a prompt that includes a restatement and gist answer
- I can write an effective response to a prompt that includes an introduction, details/evidence, and a conclusion using a "Better Answer Organizer"
- I can transfer my knowledge of paragraph and essay writing to constructed response writing

CC Standards - Writing:

- W.5.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly
- W.5.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- W.5.9 - Draw evidence from literary or information texts to support analysis, reflection, and research

Background:

This is my 6th year teaching 5th grade at Joan Austin Elementary School in Newberg. With Smarter Balanced testing actually being a reality this year, I knew I needed to look more closely at what would be expected of my kids when they took the test, particularly involving constructed responses. Teach to the test? I rationalize that it's backwards design planning. The higher quality goals and expectations, and the deeper, more critical thinking and writing that the SBAC test requires of our students is what we strive for – test or no test.

I found the R.A.C.E. strategy (the one that Pam explained), taught it to my class, and after a while realized either I hadn't done a good enough job, or the model just didn't fit this group of kids. Responses were still ineffective. So, I looked for more ideas and came across Ardith Cole's *Better Answers, Written Performance That Looks Good and Sounds Smart* (2nd ed.). I am only part-way through her strategies, but am seeing good results.

Our Lesson:

For students, each of the following items would take a day or two. Our lesson will combine the initial ones to accomplish the writing activity.

1. Begin with a discussion of what exactly prompts are and why it's important for us to respond effectively to them.
2. Discuss and understand self-based and text-based prompts, and why it's important for kids to know the difference.
3. Examine the basic elements of a response and the commonalities they have with effective paragraph and essay writing.
4. In pairs, read a familiar fairy tale and develop a constructed response together using the Better Answer Organizer (will make an anchor chart as we do this).
5. If we have time, in pairs, read an informational text and develop a response. Share out.
6. Show you a few responses from my students' work.

Resources:

1. Better Answers, Written Performance That Looks Good and Sounds Smart, (2nd edition) by Ardith Davis Cole
2. Petition Framework
3. Smarter Balanced website for practice items

"Our ultimate teaching intentions should not be limited to right answers on tests. Rather, it's important to connect such learning to the privileges and rights of committed citizens in a democratic society. Essentially, that is what response writing is all about. It's about making one's voice heard, evoking change, and forging pathways to a better world."
Ardith Cole

The Better Answer Organizer

INTRODUCTION

Restatement of the question and/or petition



Gist/general answer



-no details, just main idea or issue

- Make reader ask:

“Where’s your evidence?”

“What do you mean?”

“Explain yourself.”

DETAILS

Cite evidence from the text if text-based



Give examples, ideas, thoughts if self-based

Use transition words

CONCLUSION

Restate the restatement



-Explain why the details support your response

-Make a personal, world, text, or craft connection (voice)

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