

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 882

CS 512 114

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TITLE Introducing Each Other: Interviews, Memoirs, Photos, and Internet Research.
INSTITUTION MarcoPolo Education Foundation.; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.; International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
PUB DATE 2003-06-11
NOTE 17p.
AVAILABLE FROM Managing Editor, ReadWriteThink, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. E-mail: comments@readwritethink.org. For full text: <http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons>.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Internet; *Interviews; Lesson Plans; Middle Schools; Personal Writing; Photography; Primary Sources; Writing Assignments

ABSTRACT

Middle grades students read, write, speak, listen, and research as they interview a partner and write an article, write a personal memoir, take partner photographs, and use the Internet to find pictures and information illustrating their partners' interests. Results are shared in the form of a poster and a classroom presentation. During the fifteen 45-minute class periods, students will: learn to conduct an interview using appropriate techniques and available technology; maintain a clear focus in writing an interview article; write a personal memoir; revise and edit for publication; use the Internet for research; learn the difference between primary and secondary sources for research; plan and carefully take a photograph of an interview subject; complete a project integrating writing, photography, research, and graphic design; and present the results of the project to a class group. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the project are included. Handouts on interviewing, introducing yourself, memoir planning; and rubrics, a photographic plan, and a scoring key are attached. (RS)

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Introducing Each Other: Interviews, Memoirs, Photos, and Internet Research

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

Fifteen 45-minute class periods

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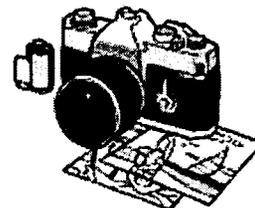
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Overview

In this unit, paired students read background information about each other, plan and conduct initial and follow-up interviews, and write articles about each other. Partners also write and exchange personal memoirs. Partners plan, propose, and take digital photographs that reveal each other's personality and interests. Then they research the Internet for facts, lists, and illustrations that demonstrate their partners' interests. All of this information is placed creatively on a poster, and each student presents his/her partner to the class. This unit works toward standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as well as use of technology.



From Theory to Practice

- Young adolescents are social and are very interested in their peers.
- Young adolescents thrive in active learning situations.
- Young adolescents enjoy working with technology.
- Young adolescents work best when they are engaged in their topic and are aware of their audience.
- Standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and research can be incorporated in to active learning situations.

Suggested References:

Atwell, Nancie. 1998. *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Dunning, Stephen, and William Stafford. 1992. *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Graves, Donald. 1996. *Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash: Poems About Growing Up*. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Wordsong Boyds Mills Press.

Oral History Project: Creating a Project for your Classroom that Implements Pennsylvania's Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. CD ROM. BCD Interactive, 2000. (For information, contact the Pennsylvania Department of Education).

Sebranek, Patrick, Verne Meyer, and Dave Kemper. 1995. *Write Source 2000*. Boston, Massachusetts: Great Source Education Group.

Student Objectives

Students will

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- learn to conduct an interview using appropriate techniques and available technology.
- maintain a clear focus in writing an interview article.
- write a personal memoir.
- revise and edit for publication.
- use the Internet for research.
- learn the difference between primary and secondary sources for research.
- plan and carefully take a photograph of an interview subject.
- complete a project integrating writing, photography, research, and graphic design.
- present the results of the project to a class group.

Resources

- [Interview Handout](#)
- [Introduce Yourself Handout](#)
- [Memoir Planning Handout](#)
- [Rubric Elements Handout](#)
- [Photograph Plan Handout](#)
- [Scoring Key Handout](#)
- [Rubric Template Web Site](#)
- [Ask Jeeves Web Site](#)
- [Google Web Site](#)
- [New York Times Web Site](#)

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Sample interview articles— these can easily be obtained from current newspapers and magazines. It is very effective to invite a local reporter to speak to the class and explain the process behind an article that he/she has written. A journalist can also provide very helpful notes for students; one such set of notes is provided here. As an alternative, a member of your high school newspaper staff could speak to your students. If a speaker is not available, use notes gathered from writing texts such as *Write Source 2000*. The *NY Times* Web site provides a link for students to ask reporters questions about interviewing and writing. Many city newspapers provide similar sites.
- Sample memoirs are readily available in most literature anthologies, and chapters of autobiographical books also work well. Select examples that are diverse in style and subject. You may encourage students to write a poem or to use present tense as Donald Graves and Stafford and Dunning suggest.
- Notes on planning a good photograph. Photography, journalism, or art teachers are good resources here. Again, inviting an “expert” to demonstrate is helpful, but anyone who is experienced with digital cameras can do this presentation.
- [Planning sheets](#) should be distributed as needed and [scoring keys](#) for the article, memoir, and poster in advance.
- [Ask Jeeves](#) is a helpful Internet site, and your school will have a list of others. School computer labs and libraries may filter some sites that students are permitted to use by their parents, so many students will want to do part of their Internet work at home. Follow your school policy.

Preparation

1. Arrange for guest speakers if possible. Local newspapers, parents, and special subject teachers are good possibilities. (Offer to switch places with a special subject teacher for a period or two.)
2. Prepare a questionnaire for students to complete early in the year. An "Introduce Yourself!" packet serves two purposes: you can get to know something about each student, and you can make sure that there is enough background information to spark interview questions. Nancie Atwell has excellent ideas for questions, but you can ask any questions that you think will elicit interesting answers. Good possibilities include "What is one thing people would be surprised to know about you?" and "What is the accomplishment you are most proud of?" Lists of favorites are helpful, too. In order to help writers to establish a focus in an interview and article, you might ask each student what they would like a newspaper story about them to emphasize.
3. Fill out the questionnaire yourself and prepare a class set of copies. Your students can use it to practice writing good questions.
4. Some students like to use tape recorders for their interviews, and some prefer to take notes. Check on the availability of recorders, cassette tapes, and batteries in your school. Many kids have microcassette recorders that they can bring from home.
5. Prepare scoring keys and planning sheets in advance so that both you and the students have targets.
6. If possible, prepare a sample poster. (This unit is set up for posters as final projects, but if you and students are comfortable with PowerPoint, some may prefer to do a slide show. You could adjust requirements for the project accordingly. You could write your own memoir and have someone take a photo of you, or you could use material from a celebrity interview or autobiography. Use Internet sites to find pictures, lyrics of favorite songs, top-ten lists, sports statistics, poems, book titles, etc., that reflect personal interests. Arrange all the material attractively on a piece of poster board or as part of a slide show.
7. Schedule computer time and check with your school librarian/computer specialist about appropriate web sites that are not filtered out by your system.
8. Arrange to borrow a digital camera or two—more if you can get them. Also make sure that you have access to a computer that will print the photos. If you have a classroom computer, it is best if you can print there while kids are working on other things. It is not necessary to use photo-quality paper, but it is helpful to be able to adjust brightness, contrast, and size for the pictures.
9. Prepare hall passes for students to use when they are out and about taking photos. Get permission and determine limitations on where students can go. (In my building other teachers help out; one of the physical education teachers monitors students who want to take pictures in the pool area, and other teachers welcome kids into the library, computer lab, etc.). Pair up the students in your class. Do not allow good friends to work together; they often assume that they know everything about each other and don't ask interesting questions. In the end, the students enjoy learning about kids they didn't know well before. If you have an uneven number, a trio can work together, but they will often need time extensions. It can help to put a potentially unreliable student into a trio; the extra help often keeps that student going, and it is always possible, in extreme cases, to revert to a pair.
10. Plan the schedule so that you have enough time to read all the papers and allow the students time to rewrite each one. The due date for the final project should be at least a week after the final rewrites are collected so that you have time to read them again and return them. You can double up activities so that some students are taking photos or searching the Internet while others are working on rewriting papers.
11. This unit has been done with eighth graders who have experience with computers and word processing; many have had instruction with digital cameras. Students without such background may need additional support.
12. Students for whom the memoir is new can read more teen-interest articles in preparation. If you intend to offer poems as an option for memoirs, you might do this unit after a poetry unit so that students are familiar with form, imagery, etc.
13. Students may find it difficult to limit the focus of their articles. If they have not had practice with this, they will need some support. Analyzing some sample articles will help, and this will also provide an opportunity to look at catchy lead sentences. You will need to reassure the students that it is not possible to use all their gathered information in their final articles. This unit is a good

place to reinforce adjective and adverb clauses since students will find that complex sentences will help them to write interesting, detailed articles and memoirs.

14. Students may need help with the concept of primary and secondary sources. It helps to use something they are studying in another class or a recent event in the school as an example. For instance, their social studies chapter on the Declaration of Independence is a secondary source, but the document itself is a primary source, as are the letters, diaries, and newspaper articles written by the men who wrote and voted on the document. The student whose best friend was on the school bus that broke down on the way to school is a secondary source, but the official report filed by the bus driver is a primary source. A person who wants more detail about the breakdown might interview the driver as well as the students who were actually on the bus at the time; these are also primary sources. The point here is to help students see that interviewing people is a valuable resource. Middle school students can interview Holocaust survivors, local government officials, authors, scientists, etc., for a wide variety of assignments.

Instruction and Activities

Day One

1. Introduce the unit and explain the scope of the project. Show sample(s) and answer questions.
2. Explain/demonstrate the difference between primary and secondary sources and the importance of interviewing as a research tool.

Day Two

1. Guest speaker (or prepared presentation) talks about how to prepare for an interview, writing initial and follow-up questions, and using interview notes to write an article.
2. Students ask follow-up questions as necessary.

Day Three

1. Discuss the interview presentation and list ways that it can be applied to our interview assignment. Provide [Interview Handout](#).
2. Using the questionnaire that the teacher has filled out, plan some initial and follow-up questions.
3. Practice interviewing the teacher. (It is best not to "help" here; if a student asks a dead-end question, answer only what was asked. Then you can discuss ways to plan better questions.)

Day Four

1. Review interview basics and demonstrate use of tape recorders.
2. Assign pairs for the project. Exchange "[Introduce Yourself!](#)" packets. Each student should read his/her partner's packet carefully and write at least five interview questions and at least one follow-up for each question. These questions must be completed for homework.

Day Five

Begin interviews. For homework each student should write the focus of his/her article, using either a headline or a lead sentence. For more information on teaching leads see [Leading to Great Places in the Middle School Classroom](#). In addition, each student should make a list of follow-up questions that still need to be answered.

Day Six

1. Distribute and discuss the [Interview Article Scoring Key](#). Announce the due date (in about one week).
2. Discuss the elements of a good photograph: location, lighting, distance, angle; clothing, props, expression, tone.
3. In pairs, students should complete follow-up interviews and begin the [Interview Project Photograph Plan](#) sheet.
4. Students should begin to write their articles for homework. You may want to provide

workshop time for working on the articles at this point.

Day Seven

1. Discuss essential elements of memoirs and read several samples in class.
2. Complete the photo plan.

Day Eight

1. Read more memoir samples in class and discuss them.
2. Begin the Memoir Planning Sheet. Students must complete this exercise for homework.
3. Students whose photo plan has been approved and who have their materials may leave in pairs to take their photos. (This will continue for several days, depending on how many cameras you have available.)

Day Nine

1. Distribute and discuss the Memoir Assignment Scoring Key. Announce the due date (in about one week).
2. If necessary or desired, practice descriptive writing. For example, ask students to "show" you a messy room or a bratty toddler.
3. Workshop time for the memoir and photos.

Day Ten

Workshop day. Students should work on articles, memoirs, or photos.

Day Eleven

1. Discuss the Internet search. Suggest helpful sites (or ask your librarian to do so).
2. Distribute and discuss the Interview Project Scoring Key.
3. Students should make a list of at least eight items that they plan to search for on the Internet. This list should be completed for homework.
4. Workshop time.

Day Twelve

Workshop time to revise articles, complete memoirs, and take photos.

Days Thirteen and Fourteen

Internet search. Schedule at least one full period for this computer work; two classes would be better, but availability of computers may be a problem. Many students will continue their searches at home.

Day Fifteen

(This may be several days later, depending on when you are able to finish reading all the memoirs)

1. Workshop time to revise memoirs. Set a due date for revised memoirs.
2. Revised articles should be turned in by this time.
3. Establish a final due date for the completed project, allowing yourself enough time to read all the revised papers and students enough time to create and decorate the poster or make the slide show once all papers are returned.

Presentation Day(s)

Each student will present his/her partner to the class by explaining the completed project. Posters can then be displayed in homerooms or hallways, and finally students take home to their families the poster (or slide show on CD) created by their partners.

Web Resources

New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com>

At this site, students can post questions that will be answered within a few days by staff reporters.

Ask Jeeves

<http://www.ask.com/>

Students can pose questions about topics of interest to their partners. If they ask for pictures, they will be linked to helpful sites.

Google

<http://www.google.com>

This search engine will also provide students with links to their partners' areas of interest.

Rubric Template

http://edweb.sdsu.edu/triton/july/rubrics/Rubric_Template.html

This is a template that may help you to adjust the scoring keys supplied here to fit your needs.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- The interview article, memoir, and the final project are formally scored according to a rubric which has been distributed and discussed in advance.
 - The oral presentation is scored using a short rubric.
 - Intermediate planning sheets and progress reports are given homework or class work points.
 - At the end of the unit, a general discussion is held to find out what students see as strengths and weaknesses of the unit.
-

NCTE/IRA Standards

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

7 - Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

read·write·think

 International
Reading Association

NCTE

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THE INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

- Try to develop one good lead question to open things up.
- Include background info that must be collected.
- Develop listening curiosity.
- Jot new questions as they occur during interview.

INTERVIEW

Attitude

- Be friendly--"I am glad to be spending this time with you."
- Be authoritative, not hesitant. By agreeing to do interview, person gives you the right to ask questions. However, he/she retains right to decline to answer.
- Be quiet--listen rather than trying to impress the subject with your knowledge.
- Get info in their words. Pause after answers to give subject chance to elaborate. Sometimes the best follow-up question is no question.
- Be responsive, make eye contact, nod, smile--show that you are awake and listening!
- Be polite. If the subject starts to ramble, listen. When they pause, then you can change the subject.

Focus on answers, not questions:

- Let answer lead naturally to next question rather than worrying about what else you want to ask. (Example--conversations). You can refer to your list of questions at a break or pause to get conversation going again.
- At end, take a minute to briefly review your questions to ensure you got needed background info, or remembered to ask crucial questions.
- Take notes on observations as well as information.

NOTES

- Don't focus so hard on taking notes that you miss answers, cues. Notes are to jog your memory later. This is not an essay test!
- Use abbreviations, shorthand, and quick phrases rather than full sentences.
- Quotes--Anything you might want to quote, take more careful notes (You can leave out obvious words like "the"). Put them in "marks" so you remember that it is a quote. If having trouble getting it down accurately, ask him/her to hold up for a minute, and read back the words. No one wants to be misquoted.

WRITING

- Soon after the interview, review notes to ensure you can read them!
- Rewrite, add, and clarify while the interview is fresh in your mind.
- Put notes away. Let sense of the interview stew around in the back of your mind until it gels. Find the focus:
 - Use "tell a friend" method.
 - Explain the story in one sentence.
 - Write a headline.
 - Find your lead. Find the lead by asking yourself, "What was the most interesting?" With a focus and a good lead, the rest will flow naturally.

- Write the first draft without referring to notes! Then, look over notes to see what ideas, info, etc., are missing that you might want to include.
- You do not have to use everything.
- Write "fix later" or mark with an asterisk parts that need work--don't get hung up on making it perfect the first time through, or you will get laryngitis (lose the voice, or flow)!
- If you have info from another source, identify it.
- Read finished draft out loud--you will hear the rough parts that hide when you read it.
- Check accuracy of facts before rewriting.
- Envision your article as a story with a plot: beginning, middle, end. Your subject is a character in that story. Make your reader see, hear, and care about that subject/character.

Linda Lyman, the Penn Franklin, Murrysville, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCE YOURSELF!



NAME:

1. When and where were you born?
2. How many brothers/sisters do you have? What are their ages?
3. In what other places have you lived besides here?
4. What are your favorite activities/hobbies/sports? Why? (Feel free to name several.)
5. What is the best place you've ever lived in or visited? Please explain.
6. What is the accomplishment that you are proudest of in your life? Why are you proud of it? Please explain.
7. What is a weakness or flaw that you would like to eliminate? (Some examples are sleeping in too often, sloppiness, forgetting homework, eating too much junk food, etc.)
8. Please choose three words that describe you best:
9. What is something that you would like people to know about you?
10. What is something that people might be surprised to know about you?
11. What is something that you would like to get around to doing some day? Why?
12. Name three things you could do without:

13. What is your favorite movie?
14. What is your favorite book?
15. What is your favorite CD?
16. What is the name of your favorite music group or singer?
17. What TV show do you try not to miss?
18. What are your favorite foods?
19. What is/are your favorite restaurant(s)?
20. What is one of your favorite memories?
21. What is the best learning experience that you ever had? Please explain.
22. Are you a writer? If your answer is YES, what kinds of things do you write? Have you ever been published?
23. Why do people write?
24. How did you learn to read?
25. What does a person have to do in order to be a good reader?
26. What kinds of books do you like to read?
27. How do you decide which books you'll read?

28. Have you ever reread a book? If so, can you name it/them here?

29. Do you ever read at home for pleasure? What kinds of things do you read at home for pleasure?

29. Who are your favorite authors?

30. In general, how do you feel about reading?

31. If someone were to write a newspaper or magazine article about you, what would you like the writer to use as a focus (central idea)?

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Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

MEMOIR PLANNING SHEET

Think about some possible objects, events, or people, or places that helped to shape you.

Objects Events People Places

Select one of these:

Describe it.

Tell us how that shaped and influenced you.

Marion Dugan, Literacy Department, West Chester University

Name _____

INTERVIEW ARTICLE SCORING KEY

Focus

- 4 Article has a clear purpose and focus area.
- 3 Multiple foci. There seems to be more than one emphasis.
- 2 Fuzzy focus. The article is confusing in parts.
- 1 The article is confusing throughout.
- 0 Unacceptable work.

Organization

- 4 Paragraph divisions are obvious and paragraph order is logical. Introduction and conclusion are strong.
- 3 Weak paragraph organization OR problems in the introduction/conclusion
- 2 Weak organization AND problems in the introduction/conclusion.
- 1 Few or no paragraph divisions.
- 0 Unacceptable work.

Content

- 7 – 8 Article contains several complete, interesting details about the subject. Details are clearly related to the focus and purpose of the article. Article reads like a story with beginning, middle, and end. The reader understands and is interested.
- 5 – 6 Article is interesting and reads like a story, but some minor details are missing. The reader is left with minor questions.
- 3 – 4 Article is incomplete; major ideas are introduced but not explained in detail.
- 1 – 2 Article is short, sketchy, superficial.
- 0 Unacceptable work.

Style

- 4 Precise word choice and varied sentence structure result in an interesting article.
- 2 Word choice and sentence variety are acceptable.
- 0 Unacceptable work.

Conventions

- 4 Grammar, usage, and spelling are perfect.
- 3 One spelling error or major grammar/usage error OR a few minor errors.
- 2 Several minor errors OR two major errors.
- 1 More than two major errors.
- 0 Unacceptable work.

TOTAL SCORE _____

INTERVIEW PROJECT PHOTOGRAPH PLAN

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

PHOTOGRAPH LOCATION

LIGHTING CONCERNS

PROPS

CLOTHES

PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

PROJECT PRESENTATION SCORING KEY

NAME _____ PD. _____ DATE _____

CONTENT

How the pictures are related to the subject	0	1	2
What the memoir and the article are about	0	1	2
Minimum of 1 minute in length	0	1	2

PRESENTATION

Eye contact	0	1
No looking down	0	1
No reading	0	1
Loudness	0	1
Enthusiasm/interest	0	1
Clarity (NO chewing gum!)	0	1

TOTAL _____/12



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