

Writing and Drumming as Test Preparation

In this integration, West African drumming and creative writing combined forces to help students enjoy intersession studies, in seven days over two weeks. Using one art form to inspire another is *Ekphrastic*. (which rhymes with fantastic!)

When implemented at Whale Branch Elementary School, 4th & 5th students opted to attend, and experienced West African drumming in order to reinforce their lessons on westward trails in American history. That's the **Engage & Build Knowledge** phase of the project.



Then they received instruction in creative writing, and **applied** their drumming experiences and imaginations in afternoon creative writing sessions, **reflecting** on what they experienced and felt. The unhurried, out-of-school vibe added to the enjoyment. One teacher, Ms. Hicks, noted that the students were very engaged.

Artist credits:

Lisa Annelouise Rentz, lisa@eatgoodbread.com, 843-525-6911
Diane Hemmings is now a full-time music teacher.

Good for these grades/ages: 3rd-12th

Time needed for this project: 7 sessions

Preparation:

- **preface with:** unit on westward trails
- **student prior knowledge:** basic writing skills
- **physical space:** large room to accommodate drum circle, desks and chairs
- **materials & supplies needed:** West African drums, paper and pencils, westward trails wall map, whiteboard, plenty of time for an in-depth writing experience.
- **staging:** organize and prep writing and music tools.

Key Skills:

- **art-making:** performing in a group; writing on your own.
- **academic:** westward trails, U.S. history, essay-writing.

Vocabulary: beat, polyrhythms, tempo, rest, ensemble

Instruction

drumming:

1D. Learn the ABCs of West African Drumming

2D. Learn and perform a beginners' ensemble

3D. Learn rhythms that represent each westward trail.

4D. Students arrange an ensemble of the westward trail rhythms, deciding the order each rhythm enters the ensemble.

5D. Students experience each part of the arrangement through different instruments and types of drums.



creative writing:

the 5-step creative writing process is distributed across seven days: pre-writing; drafting; revising; editing; publishing.

1W. Students participate in a classwide discussion about creative writing and their first drumming session, brainstorming out loud for writing "My African Drumming Experience." *What did you like about it? What did you learn?*

2W. On paper, students brainstorm a character who is an African drummer.



Students begin writing a story that includes this character. At the end of each session, share progress— *Who is happy with their story? What are you planning to write tomorrow? Who introduced another character?* Note that some students will write about both drumming and westward trails, but others will not. The choice is theirs, keeping with the prompt "My African Drumming Experience." *Writers have to make choices!*

3W. In each session, ask students for plot, action, drumming vocabulary, and dialogue. Provide on-going feedback about with students as they write. *Are you including sounds? What about vibration?*

4W. Address the importance of a good conclusion. Among other things, a conclusion answers questions and makes the reader feel satisfied that he got through the whole story. *Writing a strong conclusion is like cleaning up after*

dinner— clear the table, garbage in the can, dishes rinsed in the sink, table wiped off.

6W. Students who finish their stories can work on presentation draft. Provide colorful paper, glue sticks, etc. to hand-bind and decorate their original stories.

7W. Publishing means sharing the final, finished piece. Continue the audio drumming experience with the writing— students can share outloud, make audio-recordings of their stories. Students should experience themselves through technology, rather than just being passive recipients: Dragon Naturally Speaking has a free app, iphones have a voice memo recorder, etc.

creative writing notes from Lisa Rentz:

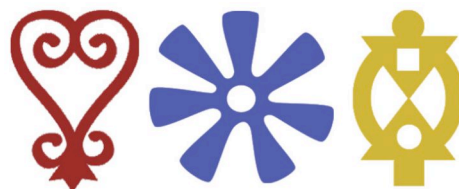
Participation and attention were maintained, as was a minimum of written work each day. Students received feedback in writing and verbally. Classroom discussions required appropriate involvement from all, and the outcome of student writing was based in part on a willingness to revise and expand.

Students successfully made it through the writing process-- creatively. They were thoughtful and involved in their own stories and each others. Students used drumming vocabulary, concepts and hands-on experiences to inform their stories.

Responding to the fusion of art and information, students spontaneously and usefully made up terms and words, naming drums for example, which adds a lot to their developing writing style.

In the writing session, students can be assessed on task commitment— pursuing the spirit of creative writing, working gracefully in a writing environment, using concepts and vocabulary from drumming, sharing and critiquing appropriately.

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