



WRITER-IN-RESIDENCY: The Democracy Project

- a week long residency that can be modified to fit the social studies curriculum of any grade level

Proposal:

During the first class the students and I will discuss democracy and how it applies to our lives. We will discuss the outcomes of democracy, fairness, opportunity, equality, human dignity, justice, civil rights, freedom and overall citizenship. What I want is the student to create individual scenarios in which an example of democracy is the outcome.

This is foremost, a creative writing project shaped around social studies curriculum. My plan is to have the students work backwards from their diplomatic outcome (ending) to the situations (middle, beginning of the narrative) that would create that ending.

Together, in three subsequent classes, we would discuss plot, character, pov, tension etc and have writing exercises that would reinforce these parts of story. Each day they would use these writing exercises to add to their own story.

By the fourth days the students would have created an individual narrative that would ultimately illustrate one of the principles of democracy. We will revise on the fourth day, gather them (and possibly have some readings) on the final day and, voila, a book of stories, each in the child's own voice, each an example of their personal take on the democratic process.

I have done this type of project before with great success, but I would ask for your help in the classroom. Not all students will easily buy into a writing project but my intension is to make this fun and exciting.

Daily Teaching Examples:

Day one – introduction of self and clear definition of what we are doing and what we hope to achieve in the next week. Brainstorm with kids about examples of democracy and what that could mean. We are starting at the dénouement. We must create from that. The first exercise is to figure out what your moral will be and work backwards, thinking in terms of tension. Talk about the story arch, how all stories have a beginning, middle and end and how someone has to change in a short story. Internal/external changes.

If students can't think of their own ideas share a few.

- Race issue – a student is from a different country/different ethnicity/they arrive in Canada, experience difficulties in the school yard due to different customs. Think about what would happen, why? Find a dramatic solution. Evoke tension. End your story with equality for all people



- Citizenship and rules -- Cell phones – not allowed in school. Create a story where the cellphone becomes essential and the teacher backs down or reaches a compromise on the issue. Present pros and cons. Come up with creative solutions
- Fairness – a class election with the ballots stacked in favour of one candidate. Peer pressure to vote a certain way. The character does something unfair to win the vote and are called on it. Be the observer or be the candidate. Or be the candidate who is running against them.

Exercise – Start to think about who your main character is, what action happens to them that causes the story to end this way. Plot it backwards. Have an idea for scenes that will move the action forward. Up the stakes.

Day two – Character and Plot

How do we make characters – the idea of composites, drawing from people we know. Pov – who is telling the story. First person active. Create your narrator. It is not you. It is whoever you want it to be. Describe that person. Give them traits that will work in the story.