

When we returned to school, we reflected on the experience, and the students decided to write a letter to the museum during our shared writing time. Working in groups, they listed problems with the presentation and suggestions to solve each problem. For example, one problem was the lack of movement, and the suggested solution was to act out the rotation of the planets. Another problem was that the lesson was not hands-on; my students suggested that the presenter could have had the children build spaceships out of Legos or recycled materials. The students collaboratively wrote a letter expressing these ideas, which they sent to the museum. The museum wrote back, thanking the students for their suggestions.

—Allison Hogan, primary teacher,  
Episcopal School of Dallas, Dallas, Texas

### **Writing as Career Exploration**

The reporter-at-large research paper our students write in their junior year includes an adult interview as a primary source. I encourage my students to use this interview for career exploration—to talk with someone currently working in a field that interests them and learn more about the role. We research insider vocabulary and resources and then use these to compose questions. I train students on methods of conducting an interview and how to follow up professionally. The end product is always more than just an essay. My joy is seeing students years later: A girl who interviewed a nurse is now a nurse, a boy who interviewed a manager is now in business school, and a boy who thought he wanted to be a surgeon talked to one . . . and changed his mind. Talk about college and career readiness!

—John Hayward, English teacher,  
Naperville Central High School,  
Naperville, Illinois

### **Let the Object Speak to You**

I keep a collection of “found objects” that I have picked up on the ground. I tell students to reach into my collection and “let the artifact choose you.” They must hold onto the object and allow it to speak to them. They can begin by writing a physical description, letting the object jog a memory as they capture its essence. Then the real writing begins; usually, memories pour out of the students faster than they can write them down. I have done this lesson with 3rd graders, high school students, and adult learners. It has never failed to turn even my most reluctant writers into more confident ones, believing that they have important stories to tell.

—Kathy Moore,  
curriculum coordinator,  
San Ramon Valley  
Unified School District,  
Danville, California

### **An Open-House Brochure**

My 1st grade students always enjoyed making a brochure for their families at our open house year-end celebration. Our class collaboratively determined which learning experiences we wanted to highlight, and students worked in pairs to describe them. Together we gathered evidence of persuasive language from mentor texts and applied what we found to our descriptions. Finally, we designed the layout of our brochure, using other community brochures as models.

As the open house approached, students practiced guiding tours through the classroom, using the brochure as a springboard for discussion. By the big day, my students were ready to dazzle their families, and their families did not disappoint! Our informative brochure gave parents an opportunity to ask detailed and insightful questions, and the children rose to the occasion with thoughtful answers that demonstrated real learning. Connecting

classroom learning with an authentic audience and purpose makes for valuable writing lessons for life.

—Julie Webb, reading specialist,  
Davis Joint Unified School District,  
Davis, California

### **A Personal Issue**

Recently, there was a lot of controversy when the mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts, called for a freeze on the number of refugees being placed in the city. Many of my students' families were immigrants themselves, so the students felt strongly about the issue and asked many questions. With the help of the Lutheran Social Services, my students facilitated interviews with several refugees and then wrote narratives in the first person chronicling the refugees' journeys from their home countries to Springfield. In preparation, students read several first-person narratives and discussed how they engaged the reader, sequenced events in a logical order, and so on. Throughout the process, students were deeply invested in interviewing and writing narratives to show how the United States provides an equal opportunity for everyone to succeed and should continue to provide that opportunity.

—Craig Wisniewski,  
instructional coach,  
Newington Public Schools,  
Newington, Connecticut

### **Musical Prompts**

Music is powerful. It motivates us, saddens us, creates joy, stirs memories, and more. To start a personal narrative unit, I played 10 to 15 short clips of memorable songs in quick succession. After a selection played, students wrote for 2–3 minutes—describing what the song brought to mind, a memory of an event, a feeling, a critique, anything. Then I played the next musical clip, and they wrote furiously for another few minutes. After all the clips were finished, I gave students

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