

Finding Your Own "VOICE": Writing for Self Expression and Publication

Year Level(s): 11, 12, 13

Activity Objective:

- Students have confidence to embark on writing/presentation projects and see them through to completion;
- Students use specific detail from their own environment and see their own perspective as unique and important;
- Students read and view other texts which focus on personal views of a specific environment;
- Students reflect on the process and share with class their own text;
- Students evaluate text with reference to the audience and purpose, and seek publication if appropriate.

The Learning Context:

This activity comes near the beginning of a year-long writing course and assists students to develop their own personal view of an aspect of their own city environment by means of a short exercise, followed by discussion and reading of other writers' work. Authentic voice comes from own experience of surroundings.

Task 1: Students are to choose a random route through the city, with a colour cue to get them looking at their environment in a very specific way.

Task 2: Building on this beginning, students explore the different possibilities for their own text and decide on what purposes and audience inspire them. Research, interview, then craft writing (1 week).

Task 3: Students peer review each others' work and participate in teacher conferences at the same time reading/viewing established writers which may appear as part of fiction, travel articles, newspaper features, etc. (This may take up to 2 weeks).

Task 4: Students may choose to send work to appropriate print outlets, screen or display film or photojournalistic material (school, council or city library notice boards, school assemblies) or may simply keep as part of their year's portfolio.

Task 5: A seminar where the finished text along with reflective comments on the process can be shared with class (1 week).

These times are estimations only – student control of the process means that each step of the process is flexible. Early finishers will be encouraged to take their work in different directions, to take risks, and to look carefully at markets and shape their work accordingly.

Curriculum Reference:

English; level 7 Speaking, writing, presenting

Shows a discriminating understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

Is reflective about the production of own texts.

Monitors and self-evaluates progress, articulating learning with confidence.

Key competencies and enterprising attributes:

Competencies	Enterprising Attributes	Indicators
Relating to others Using language symbols and texts Managing self Participating and contributing Thinking	1. Courage to be different 2. Enthusiasm to make ideas happen 3. Effective communication skills 4. Valuing cultural and ethnic diversity 5. Visionary 6. Reflective 7. Focus on future outcomes	1. Able to write with directness, honesty and individuality. 2. Open to the idea of the city walk and encourages others. Actively seeking publication opportunities. 3. Forthcoming and thoughtful in peer review process, communicates own ideas effectively. 4. Views and discusses presentation of Maori, Pakeha and German individuals in Kaikohe Demolition – relates to own experience of Whangarei. 5. Can see a wealth of opportunity for publication of authentic written/visual presentations of Tai Tokerau environment. 6. Able to work with feedback and come to own assessment of text. 7. Begins to generate own ideas for future writing/film/photography.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Get started on project with minimum stalling;
- Start valuing their own experience of life and discovering their own “voice”;
- Be self directed, creating their own direction and publishing opportunities;
- Actively seek feedback and use editing/writing process in craft writing;
- Look for new directions to take writing in.

Resource Requirements:

- Examples of work for inspiration: Kaikohe Demolition (film)
- handout with examples of writers’ work and bibliography of “city” writing
- handout with writers’ own comments on the process of writing
- students encouraged to bring any writing that they wish to use as a model and share this in class and later seminar
- student use of school digital still and video cameras if necessary.

Teaching and Learning Sequence

Students have four weeks to complete the aspects of the task as outlined below. They will be given creative space to work at their own pace, but will be expected to regularly fill in a checklist or log of own work. Teacher will provide starter questions for reflection as part of each lesson.

Task 1: City walk: Students walk down Bank Street to the top of Laurie Hall Park (10 min). Assemble there to listen to instructions. Students individually think of a colour then split to take their own individual route through town, taking specific note of instances of that colour in the environment (no reference to each other or talking at this point). Colour may be in an ice-cream wrapper blowing along, shoes in the window of a particular shoe store, the belt or handbag of a passing pedestrian. The aim is to get specific references to random events or aspects of the city, some of which may later appear in finished text. A closer way of looking, though finished text will not necessarily focus on colours.(10 minutes.)

Students then meet at a prearranged café, where they will spend 10-15 minutes writing quickly as much as possible about their route and what attracted their notice. They may begin this with the line “Just another quiet afternoon in Whangarei city...” or something similar.

Students are then given time and opportunity for a prearranged coffee/hot chocolate while they share experiences before walking back to school.

Task 2: Students individually review their notes then share with others. Critical thinking is needed here to decide what focus to bring to the task. According to their own interests they may choose to research and deepen text with architectural detail, historical detail, council information, anecdotal, or social background gleaned from interviews. They could decide to use photographs or to shape into a short movie with voiceover. It may be poetic writing with the introduction of a character, or it may be transactional with information and impressions of the city. Purposes and audience discussion to begin at this point.

Along with discussion and shaping/assembling of material it may be inspirational to view the short and critically well-received film “Kaikohe Demolition” as an example of a presentation of our region in an unselfconscious and authentic way. Literary examples of writing about “place” will also be available for students to access. Teacher/peer conferencing is important at this stage.

Interviews and research to be done in own time or organized with teacher. Suggested research possibilities are the Northland Room of the Whangarei Public Library or the Whangarei District Council, Forum North. There is a possibility of a field trip to the Northland Room and City Library in general if we have time. Expertise within the school from social sciences, media studies or art history (for architecture) also a possibility.

Task 3: Editing to ensure writing meets purposes/audience demands, and possibilities of placement to be explored. Scene, Advocate, Museum/public library display, classroom publication, magazine, etc? Query letters.

Task 4: Seminar - Reflecting on the whole process and any successes/miss-steps along the way. What have we learned? How did it feel to put the work out there? Write something about the process in their reflective journals.

Reflective Questions:

Feedback on actual writing for peer and teacher review:

- Comment on how the opening draws the reader into the text.
- How does the specific detail used in the text correspond with your own view of Whangarei?
- Does the imagery/detail build to a complete and consistent picture? What atmosphere is created and how?
- Describe the ending of this text. How do you think it could be improved?

Silent writing (10 minutes) each lesson in journal. Reflecting on process:

- Describe how it felt to wander around Whangarei with notebook. How did this differ from your usual experience of the city? List 3 positive things about doing this exercise, then 3 negative.
- Choose one quote from the list of writers' comments on their own writing process and explain how it relates to your feelings about writing.
- Describe your ideal lifestyle as a writer; how much money would you need, where would you live, what style of writing do you think you would be known for? Describe your writing space, what's outside the window, what the light is like, what can you hear etc.
- List 3 good things about sharing your work with others, and 3 not-so-good. What sort of comment could stop you writing? Who would be your ideal reader?
- Pretend you are a famous film reviewer and you know nothing about Northland or New Zealand. Write a quick review of "Kaikohe Demolition". You can choose to take on a rather "dense" persona who doesn't get it, or be someone wildly enthusiastic...

Sample questions only – follow the direction and pace of the class to make them relevant.

Possible Assessment Activities:

Formative assessment will centre on peer feedback/teacher conferencing with the aim of producing publication-quality material. Students will use a checklist to step their way through the process of editing/writing. They will be posed a reflective question each lesson to assist them in self-monitoring (enclosed).

Summative assessment will be as part of a continuous conversation with students as to what task criteria meet the skills they can be seen to have developed. It will be a mixture of Unit Standards and Achievement Standards and care will be taken to not disadvantage Year 13 students on their entry to University. However, publication in itself is seen to be a desirable asset to students in their later career directions.

Part of a suite of standards that will be available to students:

Achievement Standard 2.7: oral presentation (seminar) or
Unit Standard 8837 (also oral presentation);

Achievement Standard 90060 (1.9) research, organize and present information (a presentation opportunity for later in the year if appropriate);

A range of Unit Standards which will capitalize on the reading students are doing to assist their own writing during the year:

Unit Standard 8834 : investigate a theme across a range of written texts and evaluate the outcomes of investigation (may be attached to city writing background reading or another, later unit). Unit Standard 12429: Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of transactional oral texts, Unit Standard 12428 Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of transactional written texts; Unit Standard 12431 : read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of moving images; Unit Standard 12433 Construct a reading of a poetic written text.

There are also a number of writing unit standards from the "Communication Skills" subfield which may be useful:

Unit Standards 3490: Write an incident report (Level 1); 3492: Write a short report (Level 2); 3491: Write a report (Level 3); 19629: Present a reasoned argument in a report (Level 4); Unit 9685: Write an analytical report (Level 5).

If illustration has been a feature a Writing Unit Standard (1280) Communicate with Graphics may be appropriate.

On liaison with the media, art and social sciences departments it may also be possible to arrange some Achievement Standards from these areas if it appears that student work is relevant to these areas.