

From Summary to Synthesis

Using multiple genres of writing is an effective and fun way to develop and assess understanding and increase retention of content knowledge and vocabulary. Following are examples of some ways you can motivate students to write and increase their understanding of your content.

Biopoems

Students can read biographies of famous people from any content area and write e-mails, letters, journals, or stories from the perspective of the character portrayed in the book. They can also write movie reviews, plays, or re-write a scene changing the time and location. Another option is to have students write biographies of inanimate objects or concepts (rocks, planets, organs, numbers, geometric figures, mathematical functions...). This activity can be easily adapted to almost anything.

- Line 1. First name (I am...)
- Line 2. Four traits that describe that character (object, concept) (I am
- Line 3. Relative of (I am related to...)
- Line 4. Lover of (3 things or people) (I love...)
- Line 5. Who feels (3 items) (I feel...)
- Line 6. Who needs (3 things)
- Line 7. Who fears (3 things)
- Line 8. Who gives (3 things)
- Line 9. Who would like to see (3 items)
- Line 10. Resident of (I reside in...)
- Line 11. Last name

Research Recipes

Recipe poems are another fun way to share knowledge. Have students gather 10 specific facts about a subject or concept. Then list recipe language on the board: mash, beat, whip, fold, stir, bake, scant teaspoon, heaping table spoon, etc. Show students sample of recipes, so they understand the format and have them summarize their understanding using a recipe poems.

Examples:

Constitution Stew

- 1 teaspoon First Amendment
- 27 cups of amendments
- Sliced hatred for King George
- 1 cup of Preamble
- 13-15 oz. of African American Rights
- 16 cups voters' rights
- Cook President for 4 years then remove
- Strain out obsolete amendments
- Mince and throw away leftover racism

- Boil on high for 3 years
 - Preserve in freezer for hundreds of years.
- Matt Lehet, 7th grade

Recipe for Coastal Rain Forest

Ingredients:

- A constant shower of rain water
- 2000 decaying logs
- 100 cups of hemlock seeds
- 120 cups of spruce seeds
- 220 cups of fir seeds
- A healthy dose of fecundity
- Moss (to taste)

Instructions: This recipe works best if made in northwestern North America. Some have found success making similar dishes in Chile, New Zealand and the Black Sea. Place logs on the ground (preferably above the watershed line and the high tide mark) and let them rot sufficiently. Scatter in hemlock, spruce, and fir seeds among the naturally occurring fecundity. Let steam for a number of years, at least a dozen. Naturally occurring organic material from leaf litter, foliate, and animal left-overs is to be expected. Once the trees seem well-established, sprinkle the whole dish with moss for desired color. Sheila S., 6th grade

Nebular Recipe- Formation of a Star

Ingredients:

1 large pot of universe	1 cup of dusty molecules
Heaping of gravity	1 cup of hydrogen gas

Materials:

Stirring Spoon

Procedure:

1. Prepare the pot of universe and fill it with a heaping of gravity
2. Add the dusty molecules and hydrogen gas
3. You will notice the dusty molecules and gas that you put in the pot are strangely in the middle of the pot
4. Stir the mixture with the stirring spoon
5. Be sure to stay near the pot and continue stirring until the mixture starts to shine
6. Be careful not to overcook because the hydrogen might begin to clump and form helium

Adapted from a Las Vegas High School teacher's assignment on stellar evolution.

Top Ten Lists

Comedian David Letterman has perfected the top ten list as a funny form. Students can use this form to show what they know about a topic in any content area. For example, "*Top Ten Reasons Why You Wouldn't Want to be a Christian in Roman Times*" for social studies; "*Top Ten Reasons I'd Rather Be a One-Celled Organism*" for science; or "*Top Ten Reasons Macbeth is a Tragic Hero*" for English. These are funnier if they are stated indirectly. For example, let's say my poem is "*Top Ten Reasons I don't Want to Be a Cat*." One reason could be my friend is a dog, but that's not as funny as writing, "My best friend's name in Fido." Be a little indirect and the audience will find the laugh. Also move from 10 – 1, stacking your better reasons near the end. Try mixing some straight facts with you funny ones.

Example:

Top Ten Reasons Why Columbus Discovered America

- 10 He needed a job
- 9 He was looking for the edge of the world
- 8 He was looking to make some money
- 7 He tried to discover Portugal but someone beat him to it
- 6 He knew the state capital of Ohio would someday need a name
- 5 He didn't. His boats did but they were lost
- 4 Queen Isabella had a thing for explorers
- 3 He was sick of Spain and the lack of opportunities
- 2 He wanted to find a shortcut to the West Indies
- 1 He needed some gold to fill a tooth