

# ***Teaching Writing in the Middle School Classroom***

## **Course Syllabus**

### **Catalog Description**

In today's middle school writing classroom, the pressures to achieve state and national standards are overwhelming for students and teachers alike. Many classrooms focus so completely on writing the perfect essay that the fun of writing wanes. In this workshop, participants will examine two common essay types—informative and persuasive—as they are approached in several non-traditional ways. To complement these alternative ways of teaching these two essay types, this workshop will also re-examine the writing process, writing motivation for teachers and students, and formative evaluation methods for writing progress. The end result of this work is a final lesson plan for an informative or persuasive essay that utilizes a creative approach in its instruction. It is the overall goal of this workshop to rekindle motivation and creativity in middle school writing instruction to help teachers and students have some fun on their journey toward the perfect essay.

### **Prerequisites**

This is an introductory workshop for teachers, technology specialists, curriculum specialists, professional development specialists, or other school personnel. Participants are expected to have regular access to computers, and proficiency with email and current web-browsers.

### **Goals**

This workshop will enable participants to:

- Understand the classroom implications of several NCTE standards pertinent for middle school writing
- Explore new ways to motivate students and teachers to write
- Familiarize themselves with two common middle school essay styles--informative and persuasive--and learn new ways of teaching them
- Examine their own writing processes
- Revisit the writing workshop, including pre-, during-, and post-writing, through the lens of motivational strategies
- Utilize technology writing resources when appropriate
- Discover evaluation techniques that will promote writing as a continual process

### **Assessment and Course Requirements**

This workshop is divided into six one-week sessions, each of which includes readings, an activity, and an online discussion among workshop participants. The time for completing each session is estimated to be four to five hours. Participants are expected to be engaged in course activities for approximately 30 hours during the six-session course.

### **Course Products**

As a final product, participants will create an innovative lesson plan that incorporates the writing and motivational strategies learned in this workshop to help students write an informative or persuasive essay.

### **Discussion Participation**

Students will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of their discussion board participation. Students are required to post a minimum of two substantial postings each session, including one that begins a new thread and one that responds to an existing thread. Postings that begin new threads will be reviewed based on their relevance, demonstrated understanding of course concepts, examples cited, and overall quality. Postings that respond to other students will be evaluated on relevance, degree to which they extend the discussion, and tone.

### **Session Overviews**

#### **Session One: Introduction to the Standards**

In this session, participants will read a position statement by the NCTE regarding middle school writing instruction

and what it means for teachers. Participants will then identify how these NCTE beliefs and practices present themselves in their classroom and compare and contrast them to their state's standards.

### **Session Two: Motivation and Writing Prompts**

In this session, participants will learn ways in which students can be motivated to write and why this motivation is essential for writing success. To do this, they will explore their own writing motivation, examine writing prompt samples, and think about how to create their own. Participants will also spend 25 minutes completing an essay that they will revisit later in the course.

### **Session Three: The Informative Essay**

Narrative writing evokes storytelling and personal feeling, persuasive writing evokes passion and the ability to have a voice, but what does informative writing evoke? In this session, participants will read and/or view two lessons on informative writing that utilize creative approaches to this traditional essay. To continually emphasize the importance of the writing process, these lessons will be explored through the active use of pre-writing techniques that help inspire their students to get started.

### **Session Four: The Persuasive Essay**

The persuasive essay is a favorite among teachers of middle and high school students. It allows teachers to use some stereotypical characteristics of adolescence—namely idealism and argument—towards the greater good of establishing a writing voice and presenting opinions in a way that others will clearly understand. In this session, the persuasive essay will be explored in several innovative ways, and to continue the emphasis on writing process, revision will be revisited as a less painful process for students as well as teachers.

### **Session Five: Publishing and Formative Evaluation**

This session explores the final stage of writing—publishing—and its importance for student writers as the final motivating factor. Students have a hard time staying excited about writing through revisions, so imagine what happens at the assessment stage, when all of their hard work suddenly has to be summed up by a grade. In this session, participants will learn new ways in which writing assessment can continue the positive experience for teachers and students; how it can increase writing motivation overall; and how collaborative efforts among teachers can improve each individual's writing workshop success.

### **Session Six: Final Project**

This session completes the course and will culminate in a final lesson plan on writing in the middle grades.

### **Final Project**

For the final project, participants will create a lesson plan for a middle school writing assignment that incorporates the information learned throughout the course. When creating this lesson, be creative and innovative—use motivational strategies and writing techniques that bring the fun back into essay writing for their students and themselves.

Participants will:

1. Download the *final project template* to guide their lesson plans. A detailed lesson plan is not required, so be sure to stick to phrases and brief activity descriptions in the template.
2. Decide if the lesson will be for an informative or persuasive essay—with or without stimulus. Then, identify a form (essay, letter, report, story, or article) and an audience (teacher, committee, friend, relative).
3. Develop a writing prompt for the lesson using the prompt they wrote in Session 2 or a new one.
4. Describe the lesson. A detailed lesson plan is not required. The only part of the lesson that should be completely written out is the prompt itself.
5. Share the lesson plan on the discussion board.