

Options for In-Class Writing Assignments

1. Have students write a character analysis based on a film clip. I asked students to consider how the character impacted the narrative/events of the film. I asked students to analyze how the character develops (physical traits, actions, interactions with other characters). The point of this exercise is for students to develop an argument about a character's importance (to the narrative) based on analysis of HOW we understand the character through formal choices. This could also work for a piece of fiction, or perhaps even a Speaker of a poem.
2. For an opening exercise, I could show my students an image from Nature (photo, painting, etc) and ask them to create a narrative/story/essay (or discuss an anecdote) that the image evokes. The emphasis on forming a connection between an image and an accompanying story will present students with an opportunity to practice analysis in a non-threatening way.
3. To steal an idea already suggested, have your students re-write an article from an incredibly biased media source (like "The Onion"), or even a news-report on TV (like the ever-unbiased Fox News) seeking to remove all bias. This is an exercise in writing using a specific style (objective) with the purpose to address issues differently. This could also introduce the concept of "different writing for different audiences."
4. Another exercise might be to ask your students to turn a poem into a piece of prose. I plan on doing this in my class to help students understand Emerson's poem, "Snow-Storm." This might be a way for students to attempt to translate abstract language into something concrete and persuasive.
5. A sillier exercise in expository-based argument is to have students describe in detail a meal that they particularly like. Don't forget to have them include smells, colors and textures in their descriptions, and even describe where they usually eat the meal. The second component of this exercise is to PERSUADE either a fellow student/parent/myself (depending on your choice of audience) to TRY said dish.

*What options for in-class writing did you use? Why was it an effective exercise?