

Literacy Unit

Unit Goals

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

These goals are important for my students to achieve because when stating an answer, you must always back up your answer with evidence. In life, if you do not have any evidence, then there is no argument. Mathematicians and scientists must prove their findings with evidence. When trying to prove that someone is guilty, you must have evidence to back up your accusations. An argument will not hold without it.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

When you are able to describe something in depth, it shows that you really understand the material and picked up on the details of the text. When it is the students' turn to write, this is an important concept to learn because a good writer will add in details about a character, setting and event so that it will engage the reader and let the reader visualize the story. Also, being able to draw on specific details in a text shows that you can determine the important details of it.

Objectives

When reading, students will be able to analyze the characters of a story and provide evidence to these traits in order to better understand their place in the story.

After reading, students will be able to describe the setting of the story in depth by going back and finding specific details from the story.

During and after reading, students will be able to make inferences/draw conclusions about characters and events based on details from the story and explain their reasoning.

Overview

During this unit, students read three books; *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe, *Julian's Glorious Summer* by Ann Cameron and *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Michelle Maria Surat. The unit was comprised of whole- and small-group instruction and independent reading. The students focused on describing characters, settings and events in depth and using specific evidence from the story to back it up. During *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, there was more teacher-led instruction, but by the second book, *Julian's Glorious Summer*, the students were able to lead discussions and describe the characters, settings and events with little guidance. For the formal assessment, students read *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Michelle Maria Surat and were given a rubric with the requirements of the project, which directly related to the goals and objectives of the unit, but they had the

freedom of choosing how they wanted to present the information and who, if anyone, they wanted to work with.

Unit Reflection

When I started my unit, I barely knew most of my students because we had just started reading class. During GLT, I focused on character traits, describing setting and making inferences and providing specific evidence from the story to back up what they are saying. I am confident that most of the students have learned what a character trait is and how to choose one for a character. In their final projects, every group came up with a correct character trait for one of the main characters. They also understand how to provide specific evidence from the story to back up the character trait. For example, one group put, "Ut is kind because she gave Raymond a cookie when he was sad." Another group wrote, "Raymond is rude because he made fun of Ut's clothing by calling them pajamas and threw a snowball at Ut." They also learned how to describe the setting of a story using sensory details. For example, one student wrote, "I hear birds chirping all over the forest. I see flowers. When I bite the yams, they taste like candy. When I feel the grass, it feels so smooth. When I smell the flowers, they smell good." When coming up with a character trait, they are making inferences. On the final poster project, all areas taught throughout the unit were included in the rubric, and every student passed. The range of scores was 76% to 100% with an average of 86%, so I am confident that all my students learned the content.

Since I didn't know my students before teaching, I made assumptions about them based on what I have heard and their reading levels. They are all at a second grade reading level; some are special education, and I was warned about a few students who are the 'problem' students. Therefore, I was expecting them to not participate and not like reading and have a lot of behavioral problems. While teaching, I found that my assumptions were wrong. My students behaved very well for the most part, and many of them wanted to participate; they loved reading out loud. Of course, I still had a couple of students who misbehaved now and then, but they were smart and well-behaved for the most part. For the rest of the year, we will be using a program called Read 180 that is very structured. I will continue to fit in discussions about character traits and setting during this program. Although they are at the same reading level for the most part, they are still different learners and need differentiation. I will continue to learn about the students' needs so that I can accommodate them to the best of my ability so they have all the keys for success.

While my students were reading out loud, I noticed that a lot of them were still having trouble with phonics, word recognition and fluency for their grade level. I suspect that this is why a lot of them are below grade level in reading. If you are not fluent and are struggling with phonics and word recognition, it will be very difficult to comprehend what you are reading. Therefore, I tried to incorporate strategies for figuring out words that you don't know. I let the students read a lot out loud (although it took a long time), and when they got stuck on a word, we talked about ways that we could figure out what it is and/or what it means. After the students read, we would talk about what happened in the story, which was a little more difficult because the reading was so choppy. Then, we reread it to see if we could comprehend it better now that we knew what the words meant. Although this was not part of my objectives for the unit, I think

that it really helped students to learn strategies on how to decode and learn the meanings of words.

An alternative way to interpret some of my students' learning processes and products would be that they have not been challenged enough; expectations have been set low for many of the resource room students, and therefore they feel that it is okay to not do well. Also, they may have not learned strategies to help in their reading, and their home environment may not be conducive for practicing reading and learning. Therefore, being in an environment where the expectations are high, and they are in a supportive learning environment with all the right resources (teacher, grade-appropriate books, strategies to read successfully, quiet learning environment, etc.) will all aide in their success in reading.

For reading, we have a scripted reading program called Read 180. I didn't know much about it in the beginning of the year because my teacher barely mentioned it to me, and told me that I did not have to use it for my reading unit. Therefore, I was able to make up a reading unit that was entirely new. I was able to choose the CCSS, what books to use, how to set up the discussions, etc. Creating a unit from scratch had many positives and challenges. To start, it was very challenging to start creating the unit. I had so many ideas in my head and to put them all together was difficult. It was also difficult to choose books that were appropriate for the students. Since they are below grade level, I wanted to choose books at their grade level but ones that were not too young for them and that would still interest them. Choosing the books was also a positive part of my unit because I was able to choose books that related to my students' lives and better interest them. Another positive was having the freedom to let students interact with each other and discuss the books freely. A lot of our discussions were student-based instead of teacher-based, and I think that the students liked talking to each other about the book rather than me, and it gave them all a chance to have a voice.

The biggest obstacle with creating a unit from scratch was deciding on the books. Should I use one book for the whole unit and really dig deep into it? Should we all read the same book or should I let them have choice in what they read? If they all choose different books, how will we have a discussion about them? We don't have class sets of books, so how will all students read the same book? Should we read chapter books or short stories? There were so many questions going through my mind, and it was difficult to choose. At first, I was trying to figure it all out on my own, but then I went to my MT and discussed the situation. I found out that there were hidden class sets of a few books that were great books that students would enjoy. We ended up reading the same books throughout the unit so that we could discuss as a class. We read three books, one chapter book and two short stories. The students seemed to take interest in all three.

Although my unit went well, there are still many things that I can improve on. One thing that I feel I struggled with is making up anchor charts as we went. I think that I should have planned out exactly what I was going to put on them before I did it with the class and do it on paper instead of the white board, so that we could have saved it. For literacy in general, I think that I need to work on letting the students take more control. I like when things run exactly as planned, but I need to learn that it is ok if things don't go exactly the way I thought they were going to as long as the objectives are still being taught.

Overall, the unit went as I expected. All objectives were taught that I wanted to, although it did take longer than I expected. We sometimes got so into the discussions, that we did not have time to get through as much of the book as we wanted. The most exciting/surprising part of my lesson was the final project. I was so excited that my students were so into the poster and did so well on it. I heard so much about using different types of assessments rather than paper and

pencil to assess student learning, and this proved that it works! I do not believe that my students would have done as well if they had to do a paper and pencil test.