

Goal:

The goal for the workshop is to develop a Mainstreet Learning Lab to rethink how local collective knowledge in rural towns can serve as inspiration for new and creative approaches to traditional art practices based on the students' authentic view of their community. The course work will utilize a hybridized education model connecting twenty-first century education practices to our rural students and teachers, with face-to-face educational practices that provides community connectedness through shared ideas and mutual understanding. This writing workshop transforms educational exchanges with learning that gives voice to a new generation of rural citizens while building fluency in writing techniques, design layout and publishing experience. Students will build a strong sense of community through common experiences, learn in a real-world context and fully engage in the inquiry process, from problem to solution.

Format:

The Prairie Writer's Workshop is a high-school level journalistic and creative writing project from the Applied Rural Arts program; initiated to preserve and celebrate rural culture in Colorado's High Plains region. Courses and workshops use place-based educational practices and are taught by community members which facilitates important intergenerational learning experiences that foster positive social engagement, for a more dynamic cultural aesthetic practice that encourages students to reflect on their relationship to the past, present and future of their rural places. Searching out and encouraging partnership provides an opportunity to pivot current day educational practices from static and didactic to social and personal; hometowns become laboratories, farmers become teachers and main streets becomes the classroom.

Approved by the school board, students build fluency in writing techniques and attain hands-on design and publishing experience. Taught in a collaborative environment, the local newspaper editor and a local novelist will present opportunities for the students to engage in multi-generational conversations and build discourse around rural journalism and a democratic free press. The creative content developed from the workshop will be presented to the community as a bilingual (English and Spanish) supplement in the local paper. Its design and formatting will be aesthetically inspired by the punk rock zine, the rural Pennysaver and the Mini Page made popular in the 1970s. The Prairie Writers Workshop will not only transform educational exchanges and enhance alternative methods of teaching and learning but gives voice to a new generation of rural citizens.

Promotion & Publicity:

The Prairie Writers Workshop promotes the students' rural perspectives in public education via a newspaper insert. At the end of the school year the partnering organizations will present a community wide presentation of the course materials.

Planning:

The Prairie Writers Workshop is a long-term project that can be incorporated into English, Art or Career and Technology Education classes, meeting a variety of CO Department of Education Content Standards. Schools can adapt this to best fit their needs based on time and available resources.

Identify what publishing & writing resources exist in your community; local papers, community or school newsletters, museums, writers, poets, journalists, retired teachers etc. and contact them about partnering with you to teach the students about creative and journalistic writing. We worked with the editor of the local newspaper to teach the rural journalism workshop and local novelist to teach the rural creative writing workshop. Encourage the workshop facilitators to help the students write, both creatively and journalistically about where they live (prompts provided in following lesson plans). Inquire if the local publishing outlets (newspaper, newsletters etc) will publish the students work. Help the publishing outlets see this as a mutually beneficial opportunity to connect to a larger audience. A key component of community engagement in this workshop is providing the students an opportunity to learn from somebody outside of the usual classroom experience. Not only does this model engage the students in conversations with new adults in their community but it allows adults outside the school community to engage with students, creating broader inter-generation dialogues and interaction. Additionally, publishing the students' work in a community wide written media form engages the students with a media form that is becoming neglected while creating an opportunity for older audiences to hear their local youth's voice and perspective about their communities.

Also consider adding other student work elements to the publication, such as photography, cartoons, art, puzzles etc.

We invite you to see our videos to inspire you:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i_rHqGbMKc
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDRRXwSdz5Y&t=2s>

Lesson Plans:

RURAL CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

PART ONE:

- 1 - Overview of course work – basics of creative writing, how to write about place, reflect on their relationship to the past, present and future of the rural places.
- 2 – Field trip to park / farm / ranch / open space to practice writing about place

Students' work on piece prior to part 2 of workshop

PART TWO:

- 3 - Students share their work in a writing circle: teacher and peer critiques
- 4 - Presentation of final work, submit to Prairie Writers Zine for publication

LESSON OUTLINE:

Hour One:

- Goals for workshop – BE CREATIVE!
- Go outside and find a place to sit. (Football field, playground, etc.)
- Talk about Place & setting in creative writing
 - Read an example of setting / place
- Do a writing prompt about setting:
 - Begin a story or scene by envisioning the setting first (somewhere in your community). What is unique about this place? What does it look like? How does your character feel about this place?
- Read prompts and critique
- If time do another prompt:
 - Begin a new story by creating a character. What do they look like? How do they dress? Is there anything unusual about their appearance? Write a scene or story exploring your new character.
 - A tornado is forming, and your character is in the absolute worst place they can be at the moment. Where are they? How do they handle the situation?
 - **Eavesdropper:** Create a poem, short story, or journal entry about a conversation you've overheard.

Hour Two:

- Review from last session if a different day
- Ideas on how to structure a story – how the prompts can help
- Writing dialogue: When you're working on dialogue exercises, you're not worrying about plot or where the scene's headed. You're not distracted by furniture or waiters or sunsets. In essence, you're closing your eyes and giving your complete attention to the subtext of the conversation.
- Dialogue prompts: Pick one of these starting lines and start writing. You don't have to know who the characters are, where they are, or why they're at odds. Dialogue is one of the best ways to learn more about your characters. Maybe one of these will even lead to a new story.
 - "I thought you were supposed to call me."
 - "I never, ever want to hear you say that again."
 - "Don't just stand there looking at me."
 - "It doesn't do any good to get worked up."
 - "Hey, there. Are you in the witness protection program, or what?"
 - "What on earth happened in here?"
 - This isn't what it looks like, I swear! Okay ... it's kind of what it looks like, but just give me a chance to explain."
- Read and critique prompts
- Metaphor and Similies
 - Step 1: Put a line down the center of your page and fold in half. Then write down a random list of abstract concepts. Then flip the page over and write down an equally random list of concrete things that you can see, taste, touch, hear or feel (try not to write things that relate easily to the first list). Like so:

Abstract/General

Love

Concrete/Physical

Cayenne Pepper

War Marshmallow

Peace Dirty sneaker

Prejudice Swamp

People Rust

Nature Bitter cucumber tip

Step 2: Next, fill in the blanks of this sentence below using one word from the abstract side and one word from the concrete side.

____(abstract noun)_____ is (like)____(concrete noun)_____.

When you do this, don't pick things that match — pick something that seems oddly mismatched or is truly random. This is important, because metaphors have more power when they take big leaps. If the leap is too small, there's no snap. If the leap is too big, it's called a conceit (which is a no-no for some — but I'm not a big nay-sayer).

Step 3: Now write a sentence that helps to explain.

For example:

- o Love is like cayenne pepper. A little bit goes a long way.

Here's one a student wrote years ago:

- o Love is like going to the moon. It takes a long time to get there, but when you do, the earth looks very different.

Hour Three:

- o Review and questions
- o Clichés: avoid clichés like the plague. See what I did there? As a writer, it's your job to come up with creative storytelling. A cliché can refer to an overused phrase or expression. But another definition for cliché, is a worn-out idea that should've been put to bed a long time ago.
- o How to ID a cliché:
 - Look for metaphors; many clichés are metaphors that are in widespread use.
 - Look for any phrases that are describing complex ideas in short, pithy, and often visual statements.
 - Look for words and phrases that are not precise or accurate in what they are meant to convey (even if their meaning is still clear).
 - Look for any phrases that you hear a lot in everyday speech.
- o Start your story, work from ideas generated in this workshop

Hour Four

o Review and questions

o Different ways to end a story:

- Resolved - neatly packaged and put away
- Unresolved - entice readers to use their imagination and create their own ending
- Implied ending - The conclusion, or 'what happens in the end', isn't explicitly stated
- Twist in the tail - catches the audience by surprise with a completely unexpected turn of events.
- Tie back - begin and end in the same way
- Crystal ball - goes 'beyond the ending' in a way, looking into the future

Read some stories and critique

If you have more time....

o Do more prompts:

- o Compile a list of inanimate or animate objects to which you might compare yourself metaphorically. (I am a windmill. I change direction or my thoughts whenever someone talks to me...)
- o Think about an incident that happened to you and exaggerate in the telling. Make it into a tall tale.

RURAL JOURNALISM WORKSHOP

PART ONE:

Field trip to local newspaper; tour facility, learn publishing process, design and layout, democratic free press and journalism basics to prep students to create their own piece.

- Invite community members (business owners, non-profit and civil service employees etc.) to be interviewed by students. This provides students with interviewing and face-to-face communication skills while learning about different careers. The students then write brief profiles about the interviewee to be published in the paper. This can be an additional article to their article about place to be published.

PART TWO:

Students share work in writing circle: teacher and peer critiques. Prepare layout and graphics for Prairie Writers Workshop Zine for publication in newspaper.

LESSON OUTLINE

Journalism basics:

- Importance of free democratic press: the role of the press in a democracy, and how the First Amendment protects that role in the United States. Together, free speech and a free press are essential to the public's ability to become informed and to actively participate in a democracy. Example = Michigan reporters revealing gymnastic doctor scandal
- What is journalistic writing: news, feature, & editorial articles

- The “Five ‘W’s” are “Who,” “What,” “When,” “Where,” and “Why.” Referring back to the Five “W”s helps journalists address the fundamental questions that every story should be able to answer.
- Role of editor, and other newspaper staff roles.
- Process to write an article: newsroom brainstorm session, importance of contacts, how to interview and take notes, necessity of several sources to support article topic, putting it all together.
- Design to print process
- History of the paper and importance of supporting small community newspapers

Write:

- Decide on relevant topic; what are you interested in? timeliness?
- make a list of contacts
- think of your angle and prep questions
- call, text or email contacts to set-up a time to interview
- interview contacts
- write your article and submit to editor for feedback before print deadline
- make final edits and submit for publication