Literacy: It All Connects

Genres for Report Writing
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The following is an excerpt from Nancy Atwell’s Coming to Know… Writing to Learning in the Intermediate Grades. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1990.

Peter Medway (1988) has written: "Maybe it will be through the pleasure of the text and not the lessons of the text that our students may best be brought into motivated engagement with reading and writing" (176). When teachers admit the many possible forms that school reports might take, they also admit the strong possibility that writers will enjoy writing as well as learn from it.

This appendix presents all of the options for reporting knowledge across the disciplines generated by the children and teachers in the writing to learn project. Teachers who plan to invite multigenre reports might wish to review these modes and select those most appropriate for their students and subject areas. It is not a list to hand to children, but a starting point for the teacher who is considering options to present to students and is willing to show children, in conferences and mini-lessons, how the genres work.

1. Individual, bound books for the classroom library. Giacobbe’s bookbinding technique, described in Graves (1983, 59-61), is one that children can manage independently from around third grade.

2. Picture books that introduce younger children to a topic and are based on students’ knowledge of good, content-area literature for children (e.g., illustrated books about electricity, black bears, local architecture, the human skeleton).

3. Textbooks for which each student in the class writes a chapter (e.g., the results of statistical surveys conducted by students in a math class, an anthology about life in Ancient Greece, an examination of the effects of World War II on the local community).

4. Correspondence between two real or imagined historical personages (e.g., a woman from ancient Sparta and one from Athens, Thomas Paine and a twentieth-century fifth grader, Harriet Tubman and a young slave).

5. Journals or diaries of real or imagined historical personages (e.g., the diary of a serf, the journal of a young survivor of the flu epidemic of 1918).

6. Oral histories and interviews, transcribed and supplemented by background information, photographs, drawings, poetry, etc. Linda Rief’s (1985) eighth-grade study of aging is a lovely example, as are oral histories published in the Foxfire collections edited by Eliot Wigginton (1972-1986).
7. **Scripts**: radio and television plays to be tape recorded or videotaped; speeches, plays, and skits to be performed; interviews; and film strips.

8. **Historical fiction**: short stories about historical personages or about imagined people taking part in important historical events (e.g., a day in a child's life during the plague or on a wagon train, a fictional account of Anne Hutchinson's trial).

9. **Autobiographical sketches** of real or imagined historical personages or living things (e.g., a first-person account of the boyhood of Alexander the Great, a deciduous tree describes a year in its life).

10. **Poetry**: collections of poems about a topic (free verse, rhymed, counted syllable and/or acrostic formats) in which information about a topic is embedded.

11. **Science fiction**: short stories or novellas set in the future or on another planet in which contemporary issues are explored.

12. **Animal stories**: a favorite genre of third through fifth graders; the stories must strike a balance between presenting the animal as a character and giving an accurate account of its existence without anthropomorphizing it (see Wilde 1988).

13. **How-to books** in which students pass on specialized knowledge related to a unit of study (e.g., blacksmithing, trapping, tapestry weaving, stargazing, reducing fractions).

14. **Field guides** that describe characteristics of a particular species or community.

15. **Class or individual newspapers** in which each article, column, advertisement, editorial, interview, want ad, and cartoon is related to a time and place in history (e.g., a Boston newspaper of 1776, a Gettysburg paper from 1863).

16. **Columns or feature articles** published in the local newspaper (e.g., an interview with a local artist, a story about the nesting habits of the osprey, Christmas in Maine in Colonial times).

17. **Math concept books**: short stories or picture books in which mathematical information is embedded.

18. **Recipes** of a period or people: foods eaten in ancient Rome, during Medieval times, by Native Americans, etc.

19. **Games and puzzles** that demonstrate and require a knowledge of a time, place, or unit of study (e.g., a trivia game about Portland, a crossword puzzle with the solar system as its theme).

20. **Annotated catalogs** of artifacts (e.g., the dress of men and women of ancient Greece; cooking implements found in the kitchen at Sturbridge Village).

21. **Annotated family trees** of real or imagined historical personages (e.g., Greek gods and goddesses, a passenger on the Mayflower).
22. *Friendly letters* to individuals outside the classroom in which students describe their new knowledge and what it means to them (e.g., letters to pen pals from another school, grandparents, cousins, and other relatives).

23. *Bulletin boards* of drawings or photos with accompanying text (e.g., plants that grow in the desert, Portland then and now).

24. *Choose-your-own-adventure stories* in which success in proceeding through the story is based on specific knowledge of math or science concepts.

25. *Posters, murals, time lines, and mobiles* that include text (e.g., a dinosaur mobile, a mural depicting the destruction of Pompeii, a poster showing a plant's life cycle).

26. *Coloring books* with accompanying text, to be photocopied for classmates and/or younger children (e.g., scenes from New England states, the Underground Railroad, the life of a hermit crab).

27. *Calendars*, each page annotated with a drawing and text related to the topic (e.g., a Medieval knight's calendar, a calendar for stargazers, a puffin calendar).

28. *Alphabet books* in which each letter supplies relevant information about the topic (e.g., a Beverly Cleary ABC, an astronaut's ABC, a geologist's ABC).

29. *Pop-up books* in which the format replicates a natural phenomenon (e.g., the solar system, the earth's layers).

30. *Shadow boxes and dioramas* with accompanying text (e.g., the habitat of the eastern panther, Anne Frank's secret annex, the parts of a stem).
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