Writing in the Science Classroom

by Bruce K. Hayden, Jr. and Lori E. Gerardi

Often, writing in a middle-level science classroom consists of completing study questions, taking notes, authoring a report, or answering the occasional test essay. It can be so much more! Integrating the writing process with specific science content broadens and deepens the students’ learning experience in several ways. This cross-curricular connection makes the writing relevant while emphasizing communication skills in a variety of science situations. Writers clarify their own understanding, mastering the content in order to accurately and effectively communicate with an audience.

Writing also humanizes science. The National Science Education Standards state that students should understand science as a human endeavor. What better way to accomplish this than to pair science learning with assorted forms of written expression? Creative activities that involve writing encourage students to personalize the material, responding in unique and individual ways.

Writing experiences can be as diverse as the instructor wishes. Any type of written communication can be developed into a science writing activity. Here are a few ideas:

**Predator / Prey Poetry**
Collect photos from nature magazines that show the predator/prey relationship. Use these as prompts for writing short poems such as haiku.

**Virus Cartoons and Comic Books**
Students develop cartoon or comic book characters to represent the cell and virus. The cartoon explains how viruses attack and take over a cell, spreading throughout the body.

**Protein Synthesis in Three Acts**
Students write a brief three-act play that explains protein synthesis. They create props, characters, scenery, and perform the play for the class.

**Mythology of Photosynthesis**
Students write a myth or legend that explains the process of photosynthesis. Use characters such as Helios (god of the sun), Atmosphera (goddess of the air), Terra (goddess of the earth), and Glucos (god of sustenance) to explain why plants make their own food and how it is done.

**Latin Name Tags**
In order for students to understand the Latin terms used in science, students Latinize their names by adding various endings. They then create a name tag for their new name, including illustrations of themselves and a description of their uniqueness.

**Woodland Obituaries**
Students locate decaying organic material and write obituaries to help them with their observation and hypothesizing skills.

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