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Analyzing School

Curriculum Project Final Paper

Creative Character Common Application

INTRODUCTION

Our curriculum project is “The Creative Character Common Application” and this unit introduces the college admissions process to students while also incorporating English Language Arts skills. This unit will allow the students to understand the holistic application process and what it entails; they will also understand how to write a persuasive essay from a different perspective. It is important to have a basic understanding of the college process before entering high school so that if students aspire to attain a college education students they will be prepared come ninth grade. If students had not previously aspired a college education, we hope that exposing students at an earlier age they will be more encouraged to do so. Also, by exposing the students to the actual Common Application in a fun and creative, by the time they get to junior and senior year it will be a familiar process. If the students are familiarized and comfortable, they will be more encouraged to apply to colleges and pursue a college education. We believe that by exposing Hartford students at an earlier age, this will increase students motivation to pursue a college pathway, therefore, resulting in upward mobility. We also believe that implementing the curriculum at Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy will be beneficial to both the Hartford community and the Trinity College community.
CONTEXT

We designed a curriculum for an eighth grade class of about 20 students at the Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy (HMTCA) in Hartford, Connecticut. This curriculum project will take place over a five-day period of one block each day, which would be 50 minutes. The students will be working in class to enhance their reading and writing skills, while also being exposed to the college admissions process. This curriculum relates to an aspect of the students’ lives in a sense that it will hopefully encourage students to pursue a college education. Reading *The Outsiders* will allow the students to strengthen their critical reading skills and apply these skills as well as what they learned from the book to an essay. Writing the essay will not only help with their writing skills, but also allow them to write creatively from a different perspective. Their teachers will evaluate the students in the form of their final essay and a mock college interview, requiring students to have a complete understanding of the character they chose. This curriculum is based around the Common Application essay question and uses real college interview questions, giving students the chance to understand the college process before entering high school. We hope to familiarize the students with the college essay and interview process so that it becomes less daunting when it comes time to apply to colleges.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will integrate knowledge from the book, *The Outsiders*, to write a persuasive essay
  - Common Core State Standard 8.2 for Reading Literature requires students in 8th grade to be able to “determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its
development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective” summary of the plot.

- Students will gain a valuable thinking skill, perspective taking
  - Common Core State Standard 8.1 of Writing states that students will “establish and maintain a formal style”, therefore the students will establish a point of view and maintain writing from that perspective throughout their essay.

- Students will identify important aspects of the character’s life, personality, and experiences to accurately portray their understanding of the character through their essay response and mock interview
  - Common Core State Standard 8.3 for Reading Literature suggests that students will be able to “analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of the character, or provoke a decision”.

- Students will be recall information from the book and illustrate their understanding of the material through class and group discussion
  - Common Core State Standard 8.1 for Speaking and Listening states that students should be able to “engage effectively in range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly”.
  - Common Core State Standard 8.1A for Speaking and Listening says that students should “come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion”.
• Students will develop and understanding of the college process and the Common Application

ACTIVITIES

DAY ONE: Discussion and Analysis of the Book

Students will have completed reading *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton upon entering class on the first day of this curriculum. This book is about a teen gang; the Greasers and their rival group the Socials. More specifically, it is about the narrator and main character, Ponyboy Curtis, and his struggles with the idea of right versus wrong in society. Because Ponyboy is 14 years old, the students can better relate, which is one reason why we chose to use this book. Another reason is because there are many characters in the book with complexity, which gives the students wide variety to chose from when writing their persuasive essays. The teacher will split the students into heterogeneous groups to discuss the basics fundamentals of the book and write them down on a worksheet; this will include the plot, themes, characters, etc. We think that heterogeneous grouping is the best method for the group discussion because we want a diverse setting in which students can learn and build off of each other. Once the students have discussed these topics in their groups, the class will come together to further share their ideas and to add new information to their worksheets. The teacher will then pose questions about some of the characters and facilitate the class discussion. After the class discussion, the students will go back to their heterogeneous groups and the teacher will assign each group a specific character. In their groups, they will reflect upon the personality and experiences of their assigned character to gain an idea of the character’s perspective. Later, the students will come back as a class and
each group will share the information and ideas the concluded about their group's assigned character with the rest of the class. This utilizes the Jigsaw learning method and we think this a good method because students have to specialize in one area and trust their peers to do the same with other characters. Overall, because the teacher is not ever solely lecturing the students, an interactive learning environment is created and the students are always actively engaged.

Homework→ No homework.

**DAY TWO: Review the Common Application**

Angel Perez from Trinity College will come to the class as a guest speaker. He will initiate and facilitate a discussion about the college process and the Common Application. In the discussion the students will share what they know and will ask what they want to know. Angel Perez will not only inform the students about how important the Common Application is, but also he will also inform them about how grades, extra curricular activities, standardized testing, the interview process, and the essay are all incorporated in the process. More specifically he will focus on the Common Application essay and the interview process because this is what the students will be mainly evaluated on for the curriculum project. He will hand out an example essay that a past Trinity student from Hartford, Connecticut wrote and the students will read this essay individually. After the students individually read the essay, they will discuss as a class what they think makes it a good essay for admission. Viewing an example essay and discussing it as a class will allow students to gain insight and contemplate what strategies they could use. Also, since going to college is not a norm in Hartford’s society, showing an example essay from a Hartford student that went to Trinity will make the college process a reality to the students; we
hope that it will also encourage students. On the Smartboard, Angel Perez will show the students what the Common Application looks like and introduce to them the essay questions that they will eventually choose from. By exploring the Common Application and the essay questions, the students will get a feel for what the college process entails. He will also go over how college interviews work and the significance of these interviews in the college process. Angel Perez will propose some common questions that are asked during interview and a list of these possible questions will be given out later in the week.

Homework→ The teacher will distribute another essay example from a past Hartford student that to the class and they will read it for homework in order to better understand how to write a persuasive college essay. They will also have the list of essay questions that they will be choosing from the next day, and if they chose, they can brainstorm their own answers concerning their personal lives. We want the students to feel comfortable with this process, which is why they are not writing personal examples.

DAY THREE: Choose Characters and Small Group Discussions

In class the teacher will explain the project that the students will be working on for the rest of the week. The teacher will give an overview explaining why they have been learning about the college process and how the book, The Outsiders, and their understanding of the different characters is related to their project. After reading and the discussions, the students will have a complete understanding of each character in the book The Outsiders. They will individually choose one character in whose point of view they will take on. Pretending to be their character, the students will choose and respond to one essay question from the Common
Application. They will pretend to be that same character when being interviewed by their teacher for the mock college interview. After this is explained to the students, they will be asked to pick a character and break off into groups according to that character. In the groups the students will further discuss the perspective of their chosen character in relation to all of the essay questions.

Homework→ The students will choose and answer one essay question from the Common Application to respond to from the perspective of their chosen character. They will choose which essay question to use according to what each student believes will best allow their character to gain admission from college.

**DAY FOUR:** Peer Review:

All of the students will bring their essay into class for this day. The teacher will collect each essay and then anonymously redistribute them. Each student will have an essay to read and review. After reading and reviewing, the students will provide comments, questions, and suggestions to their peer. The students will also mention how well they believed their peer reflected his or her understanding of the chosen character and how well he or she embodied that character. Overall, the students will be deciding if the essay they read was persuasive in a sense that it would help the character obtain an acceptance from college. Following the peer review, the teacher will go over what Angel Perez said about the college interview process and then will distribute a list of questions that could possibly be asked in a college interview.

Homework→ The students will incorporate the feedback and revisions from their peers into a final version of their essay. The main goal of this essay is to earn acceptances from
colleges. Also for homework, the students will also go over the list of possible mock interview questions. They will brainstorm how they would respond to these questions from the perspective of their chosen character as they know they could be asked any of these questions in the mock interview the following day.

**DAY FIVE: Evaluation Through Mock Interview**

The teacher will conduct mock interviews for each student. Each interview will take about 3-minutes and it will take place in front of the class. In the interview, the teacher will choose random questions from the given list and evaluate the students based on their understanding of their chosen character and the way they respond to college interview questions. During their peers’ interviews, the students will write down what they think their peer did well, poorly, and other additional comments.

Homework→ No homework.

**EVALUATION**

Students will be evaluated based on their effort during the peer review process, their final essay, and their responses to the mock interview questions. They will also be evaluated on how well the student understood and portrayed their character. At the beginning of the week the students will have a rubric, which the teacher will be grading from. Having this rubric will enable the students to understand what they are being assessed and evaluated on.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>2 Fair</th>
<th>1 Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Student was constantly participating and sharing ideas within the small groups and class discussion</td>
<td>Student participated and contributed some of his or her ideas</td>
<td>Student barely participated and was not actively engaged</td>
<td>Student did not participate and was constantly reminded to stay on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Editing</td>
<td>Student provided very useful feedback and was actively engaged and not distracted</td>
<td>Student gave useful feedback, but was not always on task and focused</td>
<td>Student added only a few comments that were not useful or constructive</td>
<td>Student did not provide his or her peer with any feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>Student demonstrated an complete understanding of their chosen character and reflected this understanding in a well written essay</td>
<td>Student provided somewhat of an understanding in their essay and wrote a solid essay</td>
<td>Student completed the essay however there were many mistakes and showed little knowledge of the character and book</td>
<td>Student wrote a poorly constructed essay and displayed no understanding of the book or the character they chose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Student was able to articulate well thought out answers from the perspective of their chosen character.</td>
<td>Student answered questions from their character's perspective with a little hesitation</td>
<td>Student was able to take on the character's perspective, but did not answer all of the questions or did not answer them properly</td>
<td>Student could not answer any questions when pretending to be their character</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Comments</td>
<td></td>
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Resources


Common Core Standards

http://ctcorestandards.org