

Video Transcript: Discussion 2 • K-6 Teachers

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JM: Let's get into the instructional nitty-gritty, the reading and the writing. And especially, let's see if we can do this: What's the writing task you're gonna make out of this for your kids? So what texts are they gonna write? What texts are they gonna read? We'll do a little bit more talking about what's the purpose for those. But then, especially, let's make sure we get to what does this have to do with increasing students' capacity to write to inform, argue, and analyze. There are folks who would say this is really hard to do with primary students, but I've seen some of you in action. I couldn't do it, but you do. So who wants in first? What writing task are you going to do and how are you going to build it up a little?

AB: Okay so for me, working with primary students, 2nd and 3rd grade, one of the big things that we have in our current standards is the friendly letter. So in order to bridge from the current standards that we have to the Common Core standards, looking at having the kids write letters, something like the Dear Abby style, to where they can identify and analyze a problem in a story and then do problem-solution writing where they can give suggestions for how to solve that problem. So I was thinking of using children's literature and I'm struggling with just, there's so many great stories out there that I want to use. So, um, the one I was thinking of is *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. And it's a story about—

JM: See you know this, I don't. Okay.

AB: It's a story about a little mouse who was bullied because he has a speech impediment, and it turns out that he ends up saving the day.

JM: Of course!

AB: So there's so many, there's bullies, there's bystanders, then there's, he becomes actually an upstander. He stands up to another bully who comes in and is bullying the bullies. And he stands up and saves the day, and then he is suddenly a hero. So, I think there's lots of different characters--there's lots of different perspectives the kids can take. They can look at the teacher as an upstander. They can look at the characters. And then I think they can have that letter where they're writing about, there's this problem. And then, here's some solutions, we can try to solve it. So we are up-leveling our friendly letter, and we are taking it to that Common Core Standard of, you know, we're being able to inform, we're able to argue, we're able to analyze. So I think that that's a really great jumping off place for our little 2nd graders.

JM: And problem solution is one of those types of writing that's involved in that shared-responsibility framework of the Common Core Standards. And for me as a high

school teacher to hear you talk about the essential components of the genre, and the thinking, with first and second grade kids, knowing what I could do when they finally get to be in high school.

AB: Right, that they have that foundational skill.

JM: It's the thinking, and the writing about that thinking that's gonna--

AB: Well and I think that by having those foundational skills then, each time we read a story, they can start to identify those upstanders. They can start to identify those themes that run through a variety of literature that we read, and they can take that skill and they can apply it to different activities that we do.

LS: Something that I started last year that I'm continuing this year is this book *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: A Barrio Story*. It's a story about a little boy who gets pulled into the neighborhood gang. But the thing that resonated with us is that there's a character, his cousin, that tells him that he doesn't have to be in the gang because she herself pulled out of the gang. In the story, she ends up getting hurt because of this. The students really identify with it because, first of all, the book is bilingual like our classroom also. But this, the characters are very similar, they have experiences that are similar to their own.

So first I read the story. We discuss it about who did what, what decisions different people have. And then the students write to one of the characters and they try to persuade them to make better choices or they try to tell them, you should do this instead of this, and in a way they're using their vocabulary that we've talked about, with "allies," being an "ally," being a "bystander," and helping each other. But they're also, I think, thinking about it, they're building that persuasive argument. They're learning how to do that. And the next move from this is we're going to be talking about historical figures. Because usually my students, I teach them how to make PowerPoints, and they, in the past, they've chosen a character, a president or somebody historical. This year I think we're going to be talking about different historical figures that have been upstanders like Cesar Chavez. And I have all these books that they can read—Martin Luther King, Ruby Bridges--they're in Spanish and in English so that my bilingual students have access to the information. And they're going to be doing a report, biography of sorts, talking about this person's life, but also talking about how they were upstanders, what they did that they thought was courageous, that made them make a difference in the world. And then after they do that they're going to have to make a PowerPoint presentation, present it to the class, and eventually, their parents also. So, it's going that way.

AB: It sounds really neat, and a great progression from, you know, starting with something that they can relate to, to something more historic, because you have the progression of the lesson.

LS: Yes, because I want to connect with them and be emotionally involved and be sure what an upstander is and that way they can identify the different stories. I've heard that people are already doing things. Some other students in these classes are already doing that. And I think that my students, once they get into that analytical state, that they can do it.

JM: That's a great illustration too, I think, of how a lot of the writing we are going to help our students do is not just informational. It's part informational and part argument. Part informational, part opinion.

AB: Part informational, and a little narrative.

JM: Yes, little narrative examples.

AB: But that you can't really separate them all, they blend together because there's so many important parts of each one.

JM: And analytical writing, the kind of analytical writing that kids will need to do for college, is hybrid. Pulls on all of them.

LS: It's important that they keep their own point of view in their writing. Because otherwise, nowadays, especially nowadays, anybody can go on Google and find information on something. But to put your own stamp on your writing, you have to have what you think and your own analysis of it in there so that it's truly your writing, it's not just something that you copied down.

JM: Teresa.

TP: Um, Lorena, hearing you talk about building the background and starting reminds me that there is a lot of work that we need to do to prepare students for the writing invitations of the text types that we're going to be choosing from. And I'm thinking of even the establishing the tone of the community in our classrooms so that we're talking about relationships with our kids, so that there's trust and respect. And there are lots of books that we can use to help establish that. And those are often the read-alouds that Angie talked about, too. And also, um, I believe that it's some of the content and the nonfiction texts, information, because I want my students to have real information. So I save my *Time for Kids* that had a special issue on "Bullies Beware," where they can read statistics and understand who becomes a bully, why people become bullies, and then is there really such a thing as a girl bully. And, I'm not at the time that I'm doing that really thinking of the writing invitation. I'm really thinking of just building their capacity to think about this subject and then establishing the best way that I can invite them to write so that they can be the most successful.

AB: I think Teresa, having them interact in meaningful ways with each other, with those conversations, and I think that's where we start. Because we have to be able to

talk about a topic before we can write about a topic. And I think the more conversational our kids can be, and the more they can internalize what it is we are talking about and make those personal connections to it, I think then that would make richer writing activities.

TP: Well and it's why there isn't a scripted program for how to teach writing. Because weeks, months go in, and the new ELL standards are perfect proof, where our kids are collaborating, and they're taking polls, and when they take a poll, that's not the end of it. It is justified, tell us why, and who agrees with you and now have you changed your mind? So that's long before we ask them to write an opinion on a bullying situation or to talk about who an upstander or a bystander is. They have had all those experiences in verbal communication where they're still experimenting with putting words, their thoughts into words, which then enables them to be really fluent when they finally do.

I'm struggling a little bit, struggling may be a dramatic word, but I would like your help in thinking about how I might invite my kids to write about this topic of upstanders. I like your idea, Angie, of using a, a seemingly simple format because of the expectation, academically you're expecting the writing that they're going to be doing. At the same time, I believe that my fifth graders can really, respectfully write an informational piece about an upstander. And I'm just, so at first I was thinking about doing a letter. But I'm kind of thinking, well, I could pose it in an informational piece.

AB: I think bringing in, like, what if they did an editorial? Where they wrote like an editorial about the situation or the bullying or the, you know, still, even if you took it from the Dear Abby type letter, from problem-solution writing, and you had them just add more facts where they had to pull in more examples of, in this situation or in this situation. So they're having to do their research on the topic, and they're pulling in more references and they're referring to different events so that they can kind of show maybe a more global perspective and taking it and just up-leveling it a bit for those fifth graders.

TP: And do you all think that if I made an invitation, my hope would be—I tend to want to be broad rather than specific and I'm not sure this is the best way to go. But what I'd like to invite them to do is think about upstanders—and of course if they chose to refer back to the historical figure during the American Revolution—but I also want it to be even in their family, in their school family, in their local community. So could I make something that broad so that they are actually picking from a variety of contexts who their upstander example would be and then add, like, what do you think, Lorena?

LS: Um, before we started writing this whole thing, I wanted kids to know, get a little more of a grasp of what an upstander is. So one of their writing prompts at the beginning of the day, the word of the day that I gave them was, "Have you ever helped someone make a decision? Have you ever had someone help you make

a better choice? Talk about a time when someone helped you to make a better choice or to make the right choice." So that kind of got them started, and I mentioned that when I was younger, my parents always told me that education was very important. So they, even though a lot of their peers were sending their kids to work in the fields instead of going to school, my parents decided that, no, all their kids were going to go to college. So I told them, "Have you had your parents tell you that? Or have you had maybe a friend sometimes "No, don't fight this kid. No, tell a teacher instead." So examples from their own lives that they could draw into and the people around them. And we also had the opportunity to have, was it, Jose Hernandez come in. And he spoke about all his struggles to be an astronaut and all that. So that was a great opportunity because the kids got to see someone who had a background similar to theirs and all that he had to work through. So we tied all of that in. And the kids start seeing around themselves and other kids around them.

AB: You know, this summer, the Writing Project, we had a person do a presentation on Cesar Chavez, and we watched a little video clip. And after watching that video clip about what he said and how he empowered others to make great choices, our writing task, at the, over the Summer Institute was to then write about someone who was influential in our lives. And it was really neat how almost all of us picked a family member and how that family member was so important to helping us be the best person we could be, and that they stood up for us, and that they were upstanders in helping us to make those good decisions. And I think that was interesting because at first you know, we all kind of sat there and struggled with that blank page of, "What am I going to write about, what am I going to write about?" And then all of a sudden when we picked that person and when we shared out, it was like, "Oh, I could have written about my grandma! Oh! I should have written about my dad." You know? But we all had someone pretty close to us. There were very few people that picked a historical figure to write about. It was mostly, I think maybe doing something like that. Pulling in a little video clip or pulling in some sort of--

JM: Which, it's pretty natural, step one, to write about somebody you know better. Um, I would want to encourage everybody, if you do a more biographical, informational piece on somebody you know well, let's move it then to somebody you don't know as well. Because that brings in the research aspects of the Common Core. It builds in that staircasing to more complexity. And it builds toward more of the academic work that students are going to write later, anyway.

I think what's tricky, and this would be my biggest advice, Teresa, as you think about it, the tricky thing with information writing is that there, the form, the patterns, are driven by the content you choose. And there are a lot of ways you could go. For example, um, if you're going to write about Ruby Bridges, part of what you're probably going to do is write about what happened that day she was there, all about herself. But you might pull in also, some amazing interviews with her of late, that, where she actually talks about it, how she decided to do what

she did as such a young girl. You're going to need to pull back and analyze. It's more than just the narrating of the event. It's, What was the significance for her? There might even be a little aspect of what was the significance of that in the community, in the school, if you can get that. There might be aspects of character. Other events. So, I think, even young kids, if you do a lot of writing, if you do a lot of fact-gathering, background knowledge. If there's a way for them to do more informal writing or drawing or graphics to capture what they're thinking about these disparate pieces of information, and then to step back and think, "Okay, I really want to share how Ruby Bridges was my best example of an upstander and why it has personal significance to me." They'll have things to pull from. It's a complicated genre to teach because it's informing. It is an argument, too, because you're making a claim about, "She is an upstander, and she inspires me." Again, it's a blended kind of a genre. It takes a lot of genre scaffolding. And it's not as easy as it appears to be. But they can do it. Kim.

KH: So this is, you pretty much said what I was going to say.

JM: Well I'm just, I'm thinking, you know, Teresa's fifth grade, I want to hear what it sounds like in kindergarten.

KH: So, this is what I was thinking.

JM: 'Cause I can't teach, I would never teach them, the kindergarten kids.

KH: Yes, you would.

JM: No. I love them. But somebody else needs to teach them!

KH: I'm a big, I'm big on charting things over time and referring back to it and using information through the chart. So I was thinking of, um, what were the important things I wanted kids to know about an upstander and a bystander. And so I would keep a chart over time so that when I read a story or something happened on the playground, we would chart these specific, um, pretty, very similar to what you said, so.

These were just what I came up with out of, on the spur of the moment, but you've said some of them. I would add, I think, but, what was the problem? What was the issue? Who acted, and how did they act? So I might now think about putting what the upstander did and what the bystanders did, so that they are really able to, and I'd ask them to cite the evidence, because I'm really big into, "Tell me." The bystander did such and such, so how can we show where that came from. It's from a story, or, if it's just an oral, something that happened on the playground. And then, how did the upstander's actions affect the other person that they were concerned about or the situation. And, for the little people, I want them to think about, how did the upstander get help? Because it's usually in my,

what I'm thinking of in my situation is, what did the kindergartener do to get help, or did they need to get help or could they just do it on their own? So I might keep those things charted over time, and then I would do lots of model writing where we would write a piece, which for us is like a paragraph maybe, a story that looks like a paragraph. But over time so we would continue to model that and pull information from those charts to write a story. But I was talking to Jayne about this earlier. I would like to move my kids from writing about something that happened to them personally to writing a narrative with some, um, now I can't think of it, I have what you had, a brain freeze. I would like them to write a narrative, but, about someone else. So not really a fictional narrative because I have a little bit of an issue with that but, right, but I don't want them to write about something that happened to them. In the end, I would like the end piece to be is for them to write about an upstander, um, not them. Does that make sense?

JM: Yes and I think--

KH: So it is like a fictional narrative in that it is something that really happened, but it's not them.

JM: And I think, maybe we are teasing around, but we maybe just haven't named it. We've talked about how we are going to support the writing to inform pieces of this and the beginnings of the writing to argue. I mean opinion writing in the K-5 standards, those are the seeds of eventual argumentative, analytical essays. Um, but the biggest piece of analyzing, analytical writing, is the "So what?" And that's what you're, what's the, it's the easiest way to say it. "So what? What does it mean?" And the way you start it is "What does it mean personally?" And then again you could start moving out to "What does it mean personally? What does it mean in the classroom? What does it mean in the community? What does it mean historically?" Um, but it's all "So what?"

AB: And we're teaching kids to infer information so that they can analyze information and that they can, you know, kind of be informed so that they can inform others and then they can come up with their argument and support that argument with text, with our little video clips, with all those opportunities and experiences that we're providing them, so that as they go up through the grade levels, they can access that more content information, look at social studies, find those upstanders throughout that and be able to have the foundational seeds, like Jayne calls them, to then let that grow into really rich writing.

JM: Well, not that we wanted to do this, but I'm listening to you all and, we could have an upstander/bystander semester for goodness sakes. And we have, you have other things you have to do, but I think--it's rich. It's really rich.

AB: I think it's that thread that could weave through your entire year in all parts of your curriculum and can pull in and just have that common--

JM: And even if they don't write about it. It's a lens to pull back on the reading they're doing, and then to move out into maybe a different topic or a different issue that they're going to write about.

KH: Aren't these situations that happen with our children usually on the playground, but it's not always on the playground, they're teachable moments. So—and you almost always have to take time out of your teaching day to address these issues, why not turn them into some writing opportunities for kids?

JM: Any other writing or reading problems we want to solve here real quick? (pause)
You're gonna do these, right?

AB: Absolutely. I think giving us the time to tease out our lessons and to talk with each other and to find how can we really make it a really thorough lesson to where it can have those applications outside, but to really develop the lesson so we can give our kids an initial exposure in a way that's gonna make them as excited about it as we are excited about it.

KH: Well we're headed towards argumentative. Do you, do you want to, mind summarizing that for..?

JM: I'm hearing moving toward argument in all of them.

KH: And so what are some, Jayne, you can help me with this, I think, so I'm really looking for some, like, the so what? There's not a reason we can't put that into our writing with the little kids. Are there other things like that that we could, maybe?

JM: The big thing initially with the "So what?" is um, is to maybe narrow the focus of the "so what" better than what I will give this to you. Um, why does this inspire you? Why is this memorable? They're kind of generic kinds of phrases but it allows them to pull back from the information, pull back from the recounting of the information, the descriptive parts of the information, to say, to reflect. Um, I just lost my thought, which may happen a lot today.

AB: I think it would be pretty impressive if a kindergartener could writing something that, you know, and then they were able to say, "because." And then be able to keep going with that thought and just to be able to use that to start saying, "Yeah, I'm 5 but I know why I'm saying this. It's because of this." And they're starting to incorporate evidence. That's huge!

JM: It is huge. Another significant aspect to teach that works across the text types and across the genres is "What was the significance of when it happened, and is there significance over time?"

KH: Significance to the individual or to the community or?

JM: And it can go in all of those, but the then and the now and that kind of distance with reflection for narrative information, argument. It's a way to really, the writing isn't as narcissistic, but it's still personal. Because the "so what" is your, you're imparting significance to what you learned and what you wrote about. And I would think that's kind of the purpose of why we're doing it.

KH: So in my situation would you suggest that that I, the kids can just do something personal instead of, I mean I would have them do that anyway, but I was trying to move on, but maybe that's pushing it too much.

LS: I was thinking of maybe one of the things, before we started even the whole upstander thing, I read a book to the kids called *Hey Little Ant* about a little boy who wants to step on an ant because we were teaching multiple perspectives, looking at it from different points of view. So maybe that would be something that you could incorporate also, having them look at it, "Okay well this one wanted to join the gang. Why? Oh, how about the one that's already in the gang? Why is he in the gang? What's his perspective? How about the girl who got out of the gang? What's her perspective?" So they can see, and I think that just, you know, eventually, that ties in.

KH: That helps expanding. How did their actions affect other people? I really like that.

LS: And it also helps them understand the, you know, the author's purpose, it can, what drives the character? What're their actions? What they said, what they thought, and how does that affect what happens?

KH: And even the bullies have a reason for bullying, don't they

JM: Well with what, you said you were gonna chart anyway. If they're going to talk about the upstander's perspective and the bystander's perspective, they can step back and take significance from both. And it actually is such an important skill to start building with your students as they start moving toward argument. Eventually they're going to need to deal with concessions, counterarguments. And this is, again, a seed. It's a foundation. It's a building block toward being able to talk about concessions and counterarguments and then write them.

KH: Concessions and counterarguments. That's why I do kindergarten! (laughter)

AB: But I think, too, in addition to teaching our kids about being upstanders and knowing to be able to identify a bystander, letting our kids know, it's okay that we're all different. We don't all have to be the same and that we all have unique talents and abilities and that we need to celebrate those differences that we have from each other, and celebrate our similarities as well. But I think getting kids to start looking. And we're talking about multiple perspectives, we're talking about changes over time. We're talking about a lot of great things. And I think getting

kids to see that we're all different but we all have gifts that we bring to the table. And I think that's important for our kids to understand, too.

JM: Well, and what you do, I think, a lot of what you're doing, that's a lot more intentional and explicit and sometimes it gets lost for those of us who work in secondary, but we're working on it. Writing is so much more about citizenship. Local citizenship, yeah, but it intrigues me to imagine what would happen if we take the standards and the intentiveness seriously and actually helped kids understand that argument is not arguing and being argumentative. How this thinking and reading and writing can actually nurture public dialogue that we adults have such a hard time with these days. Just fascinates me, I digress. Um, yes?

KH: I wonder if Teresa's question got answered, I mean she posed a--

JM: Did your question get answered?

TP: Well, I think it's an ongoing question, and it needs to be developed. And luckily, my understanding is that when the camera stops rolling, we're gonna go get on our laptops together. So I'm thinking the conversation's gonna continue! But yes, I'm on..more solid ground. Thank you.

JM: And when we have templates written down of these, all these wonderful books that you're thinking about using, we'll get those referenced for folks, right? I've got Christmas presents to buy, so I want the list. Okay, terrific, thank you.