

Non-Fiction Writing to Learn Elementary Social Studies Guide Sheet

Non-Fiction writing in the content areas is a strategy to facilitate learning for all students.

6 + 1 Traits of Writing

Although content area teachers are not teaching writing, the 6 + 1 Trait rubrics provide a common language from which to begin the feedback process for students. For example the concepts (ideas), vocabulary of the discipline (word choice), and organization found in Non-Fiction Writing across the content areas can be improved through the use of feedback and evaluation around the 6 + 1 Traits rubrics.

IDEAS: concepts from the content, specific examples from content or reading to support conclusions

ORGANIZATION: the arrangement of ideas to enhance communication (i.e. pros/cons, sequence)

Feedback

Assessment is not just summative as in a standardized test or large unit test. Assessment is also formative meaning it is ongoing, diagnostic, and to the point. It is with the formative assessment that feedback plays a critical role.

The feedback students receive should be timely, corrective, and specific allowing them to use the feedback to improve their mastery of concepts.

Feedback can come in many different forms including self, peer, and teacher. A balance is needed between students' ability to provide themselves with feedback, provide their peers with feedback and receive feedback from their teachers.

Specific Prompts

Not all prompts will need to be R.A.F.T.S. prompts. Using R.A.F.T.S. prompts will allow the teacher flexibility in creating higher order thinking prompts that specifically ask students to write about the concepts being studied in a particular content area.

For example:

King George III of Britain has just received this rather large letter called the Declaration of Independence, but he's too lazy to read all of it. As the king's assistant, your job is to write a brief summary of the document. Be sure to summarize the key points, or the king won't know what's going on.

R = _____
Role

A = _____
Audience

F = _____
Format

T = _____
Topic

S = _____
Strong Verb

Examples of Elementary Social Studies Non-Fiction Writing Activities and Assessments

Journal Entry:

Imagine that you joined the Boston Tea Party. Write a journal entry describing what it was like to disguise yourself as a Native American, to sneak onto the docks at night, and then dump the tea into Boston Harbor. Be sure to pay attention to the sights, sounds, feelings, and smells of this adventure.

Learning Log:

Every region has a combination of geographical features that makes it unique. These features shape the way people live, work, and play. For example, mountainous regions can become the sites of ski resorts; coastal areas and lakes entice people to sail. How have the unique geographical features in your region shaped people's choices for work and play?

Think-Write-Pair-Share:

When we look at pictures and listen to stories about the past, we realize that children went to school then just like we do now. However, school life looked different long ago compared with schools today. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting school now with school long ago.

Admit/Exit Slips:

Imagine you are an eagle flying from California to New York. Describe the major landforms and waterways you see from above. Describe what it feels like to fly over mountains, lakes, and rivers.

Essay:

You wanted to earn money over the summer and decided to open up your own business. Tell what type of business you created and what services you provided. Remember to tell how you started your business, how you advertised your business, and how it continued or folded once the summer was over.

Letter:

America grew lots of corn last year, but its cows did not produce enough milk for ice cream. You are the president of the United States. You heard that Mexican cows produced lots of milk last year but Mexican farmers couldn't grow enough corn for tamales. You came up with the idea of trading corn for milk so everyone will be happy. Write a letter to the Mexican president persuading him to trade with you.

Maps:

It's back to school night, and someone in your family wants to visit your classroom, but they only know where the front office is. Draw a map that clearly shows how to get from the office to your classroom. Then write down clear directions for that person.