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Introduction: Nothing Fits in a Box Anymore

This book and the concepts contained within it are a direct response to the growing trend toward differentiation and individualisation. The multi-genre, hybrid approach of *Project-Based Writing: Middle Years* recognises the differences between students, how they learn and how they seek to show their learning. It caters to their individual strengths, while also guiding them toward the exploration of other means of expression that they might instinctively tend to avoid.

Ultimately, project-based writing is about choice. Just as we live in a culture in which every person in the coffee line can have their own personalised beverage made to order, so too should students be given the tools and the opportunity to show off their knowledge in many different ways.

A vital aspect of project-based writing is the blending of school life with real life. Often, there is a disconnect between the two. Many students, especially tweens and teens, see school life as totally separate from life outside of school. Therefore, it becomes our job as teachers to make sure that the classroom more directly correlates to the outside world. Choice is a huge part of doing that. So whenever possible in your curriculum, you should feel encouraged to offer students a choice, while of course still emphasising academic rigour and content knowledge.



The multi-genre activities and units covered in *Project-Based Writing: Middle Years* offer the best of both worlds: students gain a functional knowledge of a whole slew of genres, formats and ways of expressing themselves; and at the same time, they learn to successfully weave these separate elements together into a cohesive whole that digs deeper into the topics, themes and issues that are most important to their lives outside of school. It is this step of integration that moves students beyond the simple regurgitation of ideas and into a higher level of thinking: that of creation.

How To Use This Book

This book is divided into four parts, each designed to help you, the teacher, guide your students in the creation of project-based writing units.

I. Project-Based Writing and the Multi-Genre Approach (pages 4–7)

Here is where you can find an overview of the ideas behind project-based writing and why the multi-genre approach is so vital to engaging your students and enriching their writing.

II. Creating a Project-Based Writing Unit (pages 8–13)

This section shows you how to begin the process of introducing your students to multi-genre projects. This is where you and your students can start to hone in on the topics and themes that most interest them. It's also where you will learn about the elements that make up each project-based writing unit and where you'll get a glimpse at what a finished product could look like.

III. Resources (pages 16–56)

The resources contained within this section are divided into four main categories:



Activities



Research



Organisation



Assessment

Collectively – or in any combination you choose – these resources are intended to provide your students with the tools needed to produce projects that are effective, engaging and unique. Each page is written to the students, and each is designed to serve as a resource your students can refer back to as they work through the creative process. Each new resource in this section begins with a brief statement explaining how it can be helpful in the creation of a project-based writing unit.

A. Activities

Here you'll find the nuts and bolts of any project-based writing unit. These activities are varied and flexible; they span several genres and skills, and they can be introduced in any order. The aim here is to equip your students with an abundance of options and ideas.

B. Research

This section gives your students practical methods for conducting and recording the research they will need to do in order to dig deeper into their topics.

How To Use This Book *(cont.)*

III. Resources *(cont.)*

C. Organisation

Students need to plan and structure their work so that they stay focused and on task. The checklists and multiple outlines provided here will help do just that.

D. Assessment

Need a rubric? There are options for different rubrics in this section, as well as a guide to help your students design their own rubrics. Also included is a form that students can use to record your feedback in their own words.

IV. Pre-Made Project-Based Writing Units (pages 58–93)

Finally, this book includes three pre-made project-based writing units that you can use as is, from beginning to end.

For the middle years, the three pre-made units are as follows:



Teach the Teacher



Career Quest Project



Advocacy Research Project

Each unit begins with an overview page that provides step-by-step instructions on how to proceed through the unit. You can also dip into the “Activities” section to add or swap out any lesson you wish. It is this ability to interchange lessons and create different combinations of units that makes this concept of project-based writing with a multi-genre emphasis so unique.

Project-Based Writing: Middle Years

Unit 1: Teach the Teacher

Teacher Instructions

The basic of making comprehension is the ability to read content and then accurately answer questions based on the content. For an even deeper understanding, students should be able to make connections that connect to reading passages to help them understand. The ability to make connections and relate to a text that is read for the first time is a key skill for students at the middle level of higher education. To help you get started, we've included a list of activities that will help you understand the concept of making connections. To help you get started, we've included a list of activities that will help you understand the concept of making connections. To help you get started, we've included a list of activities that will help you understand the concept of making connections.

This unit includes the following components:

- **"Teachable Paper"** (page 59) – Begin the unit by distributing this worksheet. Use it to guide students in choosing topics they will both find and agree to research and teach.
- **"How Lessons Learn"** (page 60–61) – Introduce the concept of how different lessons learn. Have students research up the learning concepts with various activities, which will help them think about how their topics can be taught to others that teach different lessons.
- **"Pick Your Paper"** (page 62) – Have students do research and select persuasive pitches that explain their topic in an engaging and compelling way.
- **"Create a Lesson Plan"** (page 63–64) – Show an example of a lesson plan for teaching a topic, and have students create their own lesson plan.
- **"Give the Class"** (page 65–66) – Examine the different types of questions before having students create general questions for their teaching topic. Make them distribute these pages, have an appropriate class-making schedule. Sign up for an account, if needed, so that students can use the website to create questions.
- **"Give an Oral Presentation"** (page 67–68) – Give students tips on the when and how of giving an oral presentation, which will help them to present their topic to the class.
- **"Write a Persuasive Letter"** (page 69) – Direct students to write a business letter to a school administrator. This letter will explain why their topic should be considered as a possible new subject for the following year.
- **"Use Checklists"** (page 71) – Provide students with this valuable resource, which will help them stay focused, on task and in front of deadlines.

Project-Based Writing: Middle Years

Unit 2: Career Quest

Teacher Instructions

The "Career Quest" project is a multi-genre unit that addresses the important concept of career readiness for students. Throughout the course of this unit, students are asked to research multiple careers that might interest them in the future and to develop a set of skills that will help them to reach their goals. Students will give responses with each career-related classroom activity, cover letters and interview questions.

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to a variety of careers, while encouraging them to explore their own interests. By the end of a "Career Quest" unit, the students will be trained in how to pitch themselves for any position, to name how ready or not they are for the job right now.

Unlike many multi-genre units that require the varied elements to be learned in a container of sorts, the Career Quest unit will ultimately be formed as a project outcome. The students will spend a lot of the unit for their three-stage "Job Interview" through the completion of all 20 activities, the Career Quest unit represents an authentic process in the real-world environment.

This unit includes the following components:

- **"Research a Future Career"** (pages 72–74) – Begin the unit by having your students use an online resource to help them discover about possible future careers. Students will do research and complete a form that will help them to analyze the skills and requirements needed to meet a career of their choosing. (Note: You may want to make this step an extension of the form on page 75 or an extension to a separate worksheet.)
- **"Write a Resume"** (pages 75–76) – Many careers are entry-level or mid-level careers. These years require the formatting and information that go into a resume, and have them create resumes of their own.
- **"Develop a Cover Letter"** (pages 77–79) – Here is where students learn about crafting a perfectly persuasive cover letter that can help them secure their dream job. Students begin by researching roles to which they are applying, and then they go on to write a list of strong, active verbs to provide to give students thinking about writing a confident letter. Lastly, students will follow instructions to create a well-written, correctly formatted cover letter.
- **"Answer a Help-Wanted Ad"** (page 80) – Have students write cover letters to respond to an actual help-wanted ad for a job opening. You can distribute page 80, supplying at least one ad per day, in which students will apply. You can even make it a contest, with only one student who can get a job interview for their topic. You can also use the page to help students who are preparing for their own job interviews.
- **"The Job Interview"** (pages 81–82) – Give students practice answering the types of questions that are typically asked in a job interview. This provides a list of helpful tips to give your students.
- **"Use Checklists"** (page 83) – Keep students focused, on task and in front of deadlines.

Project-Based Writing: Middle Years

Unit 3: Advocacy Research Project

Teacher Instructions

Advocacy is a future standard that covers specifically connecting school life to real life. With the Advocacy Research Project, students choose a topic to study (and advocate for) and also the focus for which they must research that topic. These topics can be based on current events that are of interest to the student and the students, or they can be based on general historical topics from the past. This unit presents both options.

This unit includes the following components:

- **"Zoning for a Topic"** (pages 85–86) – Have students pick an advocacy topic that interests them. They will choose a current issue or one that sparks different feelings.
- **"Write a Thesis Statement"** (page 87–88) – Show how a thesis statement functions as a persuasive essay, and have students create their own statements for using their topic.
- **"Conduct an Interview"** (pages 89–90) – Teach students about the importance of interviewing those with knowledge about a subject. Provide them with questions that give them to have to prepare for and conduct a great interview. An activity page challenges students to read an excerpt from an interview and ask pertinent follow-up questions.
- **"Create a Graph"** (page 91–92) – Discuss the function of graphs, and examine two prevalent types (the column graph and the pie chart).
- **"Use Checklist"** (page 93) – Provide students with this valuable resource, which will help them stay focused, on task and in front of deadlines.

Begin by getting your students comfortable with sitting through the news. Pick four students each week to bring in an article, blog post, etc. or topic that is important to them, their community, their country, etc. Collect the articles and keep them organized in a real-time record resource (like One Page 94). Then, once you are ready to begin the Advocacy Research Project, the students can begin the process of choosing topics by watching through what's already in the classroom.

As they do this, students should ask themselves these questions:

- Is there a topic out there that is interesting?
- Am there at least one side to the issue?
- Can I find ample evidence to back up my opinion?
- Can I find a solution to the issue or a solution to a problem to fix the issue?

For historical topics, students can use their textbooks or they can go online to sites like these:

- <http://www.encyclopedia.com>
- <http://www.ourworldinaction.org/>
- <http://www.history.com>

Choosing a Topic or Theme

The first step a student must take in creating a project-based writing unit is choosing a topic that piques their interest. When thinking about a topic, the student might want to choose one with which they are somewhat familiar but could learn more about through research. On the other hand, the student could choose a topic they have always wanted to know more about but haven't had the opportunity to explore in detail.

An ideal topic could be anything from a historical event or person to a hot-topic issue that the student wishes to advocate for or argue against.

A theme-based project is another option to consider. Themes, however, can often be discovered and uncovered midway through a topic-based project. (For an activity page on revealing themes, see pages 20–21 in the “Resources” section.)

Where to Find Topics

Topics are always out there, ready to be dissected and discussed. Here are just a few of the many possibilities you can present to your students:

- ❖ **Historical Events or People** – The Black Death • The Great Fire of London • Federation of Australia • Port Arthur • The Eureka Rebellion • The Crusades • Trojan War • Eruption of Mt Vesuvius • Abraham Lincoln • Ferdinand Magellan • Henry VIII • Julius Caesar • Hatshepsut • Queen Elizabeth I • Lorenzo de' Medici • Truganini
- ❖ **Writers/Artists/Scientists** – Leonardo da Vinci • Michelangelo • Donatello • William Shakespeare • Galileo • Copernicus • Lamarck • Kepler
- ❖ **Recent Events or People** – 11 September 2001 • The Dot-Com Bubble • Bill Gates • Barack Obama • Heath Ledger • David Unaipon • Marcus Ambrose • Cyclone Tracy • Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011
- ❖ **Advocacy Issues** – Single-Sex Schools • Paying Students for Marks • Paying Students for Attendance • Global Warming • School Budgets • Cloning • School Uniform • Gum Chewing • Mobile Phone Usage • Autism • Eating Disorders
- ❖ **Themes** – Change • Courage • Acceptance • Loyalty • Success • Ageing • Overcoming Adversity
- ❖ **Morals** – “Appearances can be deceiving.” • “A rolling stone gathers no moss.” • “Live and let live.” • “The early bird catches the worm.”

You may choose to present these to your class, or you could opt for topics that align more closely with your class curriculum. A list of possible topics could serve as a way to jump-start your students' thought processes about what kinds of subjects would provide the basis for dynamic project-based writing units.

The Student-Created Resource Library

It's true that you can use the traditional way of having students find their sources, research their topics and collect their data. But instead, consider making research a collaborative, community-building project for the entire classroom.

Imagine an area of the classroom filled with the resources brought in by the students. As students discover reference material, articles and chapters from outside the classroom, they bring copies of the material into the classroom and file them in this location for other students to use.

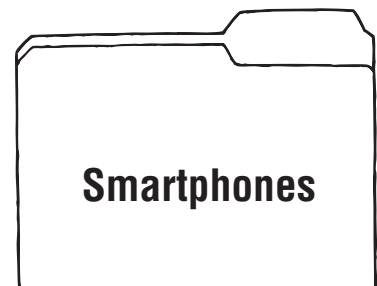
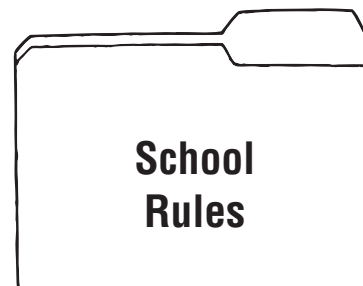
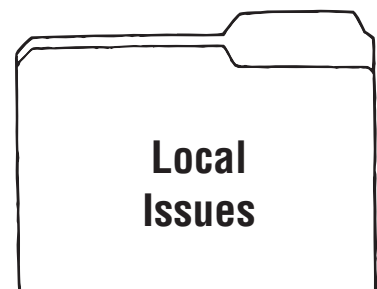
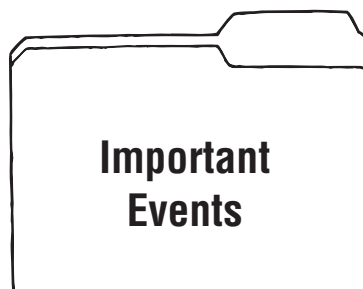
It's easy to start. First, assign a typical advocacy topic that can be found in many different formats. Take, for example, the topic of global warming.

Okay, so you've asked students to bring in copies of articles, book pages, etc. all on global warming. Create a file called "Global Warming" and place it in a special file box called "Resource Library". File all of the resources into it.

Try it as a weekly current-events assignment leading up to a research report. It's possible that by the time the students have to actually select a topic, you will have a resource library already under way for that topic.

The great part of this is that it's a growing, dynamic library. As kids settle on their topics, they continue to research and add to the files.

In addition, to encourage further collaboration, keep a chart in the classroom with everyone's names and selected topics so that when students come across research that relates to a peer's topic, they can refer that student to the evidence they found. It's a collaborative form of research that uses the classroom as a working, growing reference library.



Unit 1: Teach the Teacher

Teacher Instructions



The basis of reading comprehension is the ability to read content and then accurately answer questions based on that content. But an even deeper level is achieved when the reader can communicate that content to another person in a way that person understands. This ability to communicate and instruct is a tool that will be needed for many professions and in many levels of higher education. So why not tap into that skill set now? And let's face it, what middle years student doesn't want to be the authority somehow? This unit gives each student the opportunity to be just that.

"Teach the Teacher" is a multi-genre unit that asks each student to select a topic for a course that they will teach in a way that engages all of the different learners in the class. While that can be a challenging goal to accomplish (as any teacher will tell you), students will learn a lot in the attempt to achieve it.

This unit is all about the power of student choice. It puts the authority of the lesson in the students' hands, scaffolding each lesson step by step until each student is ready to present an entire lesson and assessment to the whole class.

This unit includes the following components:

- ❖ **"Teachable Topics"** (page 59) – Begin this unit by distributing this worksheet. Use it to guide students in choosing topics that will be both fun and rigorous to research and teach.
- ❖ **"How Learners Learn"** (pages 60–61) – Introduce the concept of how different learners learn. Have students match up the learning categories with various activities, which will help them think about how their topics can be taught in ways that reach different learners.
- ❖ **"Pitch Your Topic"** (page 62) – Have students do research and submit persuasive pitches that explain why their topics are worthy of being taught.
- ❖ **"Create a Lesson Plan"** (pages 63–64) – Show an example of a lesson plan for teaching a topic, and then have students create outlines for their own lesson plans.
- ❖ **"Quiz the Class"** (pages 65–66) – Examine the different types of quiz questions before having students create quizzes based on their teaching topics. (**Note:** Before distributing these pages, locate an appropriate quiz-making website. Sign up for an account, if needed, so that your students can use the website to create quizzes online.)
- ❖ **"Give an Oral Presentation"** (pages 67–69) – Give students tips on the whys and hows of planning a successful oral presentation, which they will then use to present their topics to the class.
- ❖ **"Write a Persuasive Letter"** (page 70) – Direct students to write a business letter to a school administrator. This letter will explain why their topic should be considered as a possible new subject for the following school year.
- ❖ **"Unit Checklist"** (page 71) – Provide students with this valuable resource, which will help them stay focused, on task and in front of deadlines.

Unit 2: Career Quest

Teacher Instructions



This “Career Quest” project is a multi-genre unit that addresses the important concept of career readiness for students. Throughout the course of this unit, students are asked to research possible careers that might interest them in the future and to develop a set of skills that will help them to reach these goals. Students will gain experience with such career-oriented elements as résumés, cover letters and interview questions.

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to many kinds of careers, while also encouraging them to explore their own interests. By the end of a “Career Quest” unit, the students will be trained in how to pitch themselves for any position, no matter how wacky or out there the job might be.

Unlike many multi-genre units that require the varied elements to be housed in a container of sorts, the Career Quest unit will ultimately be themed as a job interview. The student is assigned a day at the end of the unit for their three-minute “job interview”. Through the completion of all its elements, the Career Quest unit represents an authentic process in its real-world connection.

This unit includes the following components:

- ❖ **“Research a Future Career”** (pages 73–74) – Begin the unit by having your students use an online tool that will get them thinking about possible future careers. Students will do research and complete a form that will help them track and analyse the skills and requirements needed to excel in careers of their choosing. (**Note:** You may want to make three copies per student of the form on page 74 so that students can explore multiple career choices.)
- ❖ **“Write a Résumé”** (pages 75–76) – Many careers start with a well-crafted résumé. Show your students the formatting and information that go into a résumé and have them create résumés of their own.
- ❖ **“Develop a Cover Letter”** (pages 77–79) – Here is where students learn about crafting a perfectly persuasive cover letter that can help them secure their dream job. Students begin by assembling notes on who they are, what they’ve done and what they’re good at. Next, a list of strong, active verbs is provided to get students thinking about writing in a confident voice. Lastly, students will follow instructions to create a well-written, correctly formatted cover letter.
- ❖ **“Answer a Help-Wanted Ad”** (page 80) – Have students write cover letters in response to fictional ads for four job openings. You can distribute page 80, supplying all four ads at once, or you may wish to space out the assignment. You can do this by posting one job ad per day, to which students will apply. You can even make it a contest, with only those students who use proper conventions in their cover letters advancing to the next round.
- ❖ **“The Job Interview”** (pages 81–82) – Give students practice answering the types of question that are often asked during job interviews. Also provided is a list of helpful tips for giving successful interviews.
- ❖ **“Unit Checklist”** (page 83) – Keep students focused, on task and in front of deadlines.

Unit 3: Advocacy Research Project

Teacher Instructions



Advocacy is a future standard that caters specifically to connecting school life to real life. With the Advocacy Research Project, students choose a topic to study (and advocate for) and also the format in which they want to present their results. These topics can be based on current issues that have an impact on the world around the students, or they can be based on great historical debates from the past. This unit presents both options.

This unit includes the following components:

- ❖ **“Zeroing In on a Topic”** (pages 85–86) – Have students pick an advocacy topic that interests them. They can choose a current issue or one that sparked debates long ago. With current issues, students will consider the impact their topics have on the world around them. With historical issues, students will step into the shoes of those whose world was affected by these conundrums of the past. (**Note:** You may want to distribute three or more copies of the worksheet on page 85 so students can fill them out for multiple topics.)
- ❖ **“Write a Thesis Statement** (pages 87–88) – Show how a thesis statement functions in a persuasive essay, and have students create thesis statements for essays about their topics.
- ❖ **“Conduct an Interview”** (pages 89–90) – Teach students about the importance of interviewing those with knowledge about a subject. Provided are cheat sheets that give tips on how to prepare for and conduct a great interview. An activity page challenges students to read an excerpt from an interview and ask pertinent follow-up questions.
- ❖ **“Create a Graph”** (pages 91–92) – Discuss the functions of graphs, and examine two prevalent types (the column graph and the pie chart).
- ❖ **“Unit Checklist** (page 93) – Provide students with this valuable resource, which will help them stay focused, on task and in front of deadlines.

Begin by getting your students comfortable with sifting through the news. Pick four students each week to bring in an article, blog post, etc. on topics that are important to them, their community, their country, etc. Collect the articles and keep them organised in a student-created resource library (see page 9). Then, once you are ready to begin the Advocacy Research Project, the students can begin the process of choosing topics by searching through what’s already in the classroom.

As they do this, students should ask themselves these questions:

- ❖ Is there a topic out there that is newsworthy?
- ❖ Are there at least two sides to the issue?
- ❖ Can I find ample evidence to back up my opinion?
- ❖ Can I offer a solution or ask my reader or audience to do something to help the issue?

For historical topics, students can use their textbooks or they can go online to sites like these:

- ❖ http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments
- ❖ <http://timelines.ws/>