

Writing a Creative Non-Fiction Story

Activity Based on

Vivian and the Legend of the Hoodoos

I. Introduction:

Using *Vivian and the Legend of the Hoodoos* as a model, students will perform limited research and write one or more of three works: a fun, creative non-fiction story, a five paragraph essay, or a more serious fictional story informed by the knowledge they've obtained. Taking apart *Vivian* will give students a framework on how to write the story. This activity may be spread over several class periods with the possibility of some work being done as homework. The activity may also be extended to include writing a non-fiction five paragraph essay. Grades 4-6.

II. Concepts:

- A. Creative non-fiction gives information in an engaging manner.
- B. Creative non-fiction is based on fact and must be strictly researched.
- C. Difference between fact and "based" on fact
- D. Research includes research for the story as well as for the illustrations.
- E. Sources must be reputable.
- F. Proper attribution

III. Skills:

- A. Researching a subject for general mastery
- B. Researching details to expand subject
- C. Organizing researched material
- D. Writing creative non-fiction
- E. Developing a bibliography

IV. Materials Provided:

(<http://www.terrycjennings.com/Teacher-Resources-Erosion.html>)

- A. *Vivian and the Legend of the Hoodoos*
- B. Although for other books I have provided extensive research notes teachers may provide their students, there is very little available on native use of plants for

food. For Rice grass, I have provided a small research document with bibliography at the end of this lesson plan. For pine nuts, I have provided the text of a website as well as a link to an excellent you tube of an Indian processing pine nuts. For the third possible writing assignment, students should primarily use their imagination. This is more of an exercise to understand the powerlessness of the native people, in particular the Paiutes, in face of the overwhelming force (weapons) that Euro-Americans brought when they invaded.

V. Pre-Writing Discussion

- A. In this activity students will be creating stories about two native children using facts about Paiute life.
- B. Discuss with students the difference between non-fiction and fact-based fiction or creative non-fiction:

Non-Fiction	Fact-Based Fiction/Creative Non-Fiction/ Historical Fiction
Totally based on facts	Made up story
Writer's work is based on research, including interviews	Writer's work is informed by research, often including interviews.
Goal is to inform	Goal is to provide information in a fun way.
Normally includes quoted material	Does not normally include quoted material other than dialogue.
Bibliography is included in the work	Bibliography is kept by the author/publisher to prove accuracy.

- C. Read *Vivian and the Legend of the Hoodoos*
 1. Pick out facts in the story that would have been part of the research.
 - a. About the Paiute life
 - b. About the plants and animals they gathered or hunted
 - c. Point out how the research *informed* the writer.
 2. Pick out features from illustrations that would have resulted from research.
 - a. What the landscape looks like
 - b. What the ruins looked like
 - c. What ancient people looked like
 3. Consider what the illustrator created from her imagination
 - a. What the Ancient Ones looked like.
 4. Consider when the author is "in the head of" Vivian and her grandmother.
 - a. How did research inform the author in those cases?
 - (1) Knowing what the customs were, the author can write about how the grandmother might have reacted.

- (2) It is reasonable to say that the author can write about how Vivian might feel.
 - (3) Having visited ancient Paiute ruins, the author was able to portray the ruins in the book and the feeling of awe we experience when we are in the presence of something so old.
 - (4) Having interviewed current Paiute elders, the author knew how they used the legends and what customs they still follow.
 - (5) It is reasonable to say that Vivian and her grandmother would tease each other about the hoodoos.
 - (6) Having researched about picking pine nuts, and ancient Paiute customs like drying rabbit skin, or making arrow points from obsidian, author could describe them.
 - (7) Knowing that Paiute are very respectful of what is in a place, helped author decide what to do when Vivian picks up a pottery sherd.
4. Consider images in *Vivian*
 - a. Shimmery shadows at the feet of columns made of rock
 - b. Scary, like an owl in the dark.
 - c. Grandma's voice, like a Paiute lullaby
 - d. Chips of obsidian littered the ground by a rock
 5. Consider how to portray the passing of time
 - a. This story takes place very quickly. Point to other stories students might have read to show them how authors portray the passing of time. They may want to write a story that takes more than a few hours.
 - (1) *Gopher to the Rescue! A Volcano Recovery Story* and *Sounds of the Savanna*, both by this author, demonstrate different ways of showing the passage of time.
 6. What details bring reader into the story?
 - a. Where did author find those details?
 - (1) In research
 - b. What provided the thread of the story?
 - (1) The Legend of the Hoodoos provided the thread of this story.
 - c. Do you find the thread in your research or your imagination?
 - (1) For *Vivian*, the legend provided the thread because it explained how erosion forms hoodoos. When I learned about the fact that Hoodoo was a word Paiute used to get their children to obey and do the right thing, that gave the story more interest.
 - (2) Students may use the same thread in their story or they may have a thread or plot already in mind before.
 - (a) They should consider having something happen to the children while they do their job. Will a bob cat scare them? Will a big wind take their seed? Will they have to compete with a pesky squirrel for pine nuts?
 - d. What was the hook of the story?
 - (1) Possible answer "Vivian didn't want to be there or bother with traditions."
 - (a) Now reader wants to know what will happen to Vivian.

- (2) Suggest to students that as they research, they will want to look for possible hooks.
 - (a) Something that will want to make the reader keep on reading.
- 8. What was the point of view of the story?
 - a. Omniscient—all knowing
 - b. Allows author to know what is happening everywhere, including in the heads of characters.
 - c. If the point of view is one of the characters, the reader can only learn what that character knows, experiences and sees at that time.
 - (1) If a student chooses the point of view of one person, they can only relate what that person sees and experiences.

VI. Pre-writing Preparation

- A. Have students choose their topic.
- B. Discuss in most circumstances there would be extensive research available for an assignment. Unfortunately, Paiutes have no written language or history. Starting at the end of the 19th century, the government and non-tribal people felt that the best thing for Indian children was to send them to schools where they were forbidden from speaking their language, talking about home, and they only saw their parents a couple of times a year. In 1954, the Paiute Indian tribe was terminated and its members forced to assimilate into their neighborhoods. But that was very difficult. The government recognized them as a tribe again in 1980. These two breaks in the continuity of the tribe means that their customs and traditions, which were never written, are mostly lost.
 - 1. Re-read *Vivian* to gather facts author gathered by interviewing tribal members and archeologists.
 - 2. For students writing a story centered around rice grass, have students read the handout provided and highlight pertinent facts they might use either in the text or in the action portrayed in the text.
 - (a) For instance, rice grass grows from around 3500 to 10000 feet, so the kids harvesting rice grass would have to be up on a mesa, or on the side of a hill, on rocky dry soil.
 - 3. For students writing a story centered around gathering pine nuts, have students watch the short (12 minute) movie and read the information provided in handouts.
- C. Create an outline from the highlighted material.
 - 1. Now that students have a better idea of the subject, they should note that not all data will be relevant to writing the story. In any research it is important to ignore unnecessary material.
 - a.
 - 2. Possible groupings:
 - (1) Where plants are found
 - (2) What they look like
 - (3) What they are used for
 - (4) How and when they are harvested
 - (5) How they are cooked or processed if applicable

- (6) Notes for illustrations
- (7) Cool things
- 3. Make sure students understand that they cannot use the words used in the handout, they must paraphrase.
- E. Discuss possible plots for the stories and write a loose outline
 - 1. Have something happen to the children while they do their job. Will a bob cat scare them? Will a big wind take their seed? Will they have to compete with a pesky squirrel for pine nuts?
 - a. What happened first?
 - b. How would the kids react to this?
 - c. What details can we include in this paragraph to inform the reader and bring the reader in?
 - 2. For subsequent paragraphs, continue in the same manner
 - a. What happened next?
 - b. How would the kids react to this?
 - c. What details can we include in this paragraph to inform the reader and bring the reader in?
 - 3. Consider a way to convey a feeling of urgency or fear. Are they scared of an animal? have they lost the food they harvested and now the band won't have as much?
 - a. Short choppy sentences or run on sentences.
 - b. Adjectives that leave reader breathless
 - 4. Consider a way to convey the feeling of relief when the problem is resolved.
 - 5. Use *Vivian* illustrations as additional information on the setting.

VII. Writing the story

- A. Now they know what will happen, what hook will bring the reader into the story?
- B. Write the story
 - 1. Use strong verbs. Give good descriptions. Use interesting facts.
 - 2. Use images
 - 3. Denote the passing of time
- B. Review first draft with student and make suggestions for improvement.

VIII. Critique Group (optional)

- A. Group students with a buddy to critique the work.
- B. Have critique buddies use the sandwich method.
 - 1. Thank you for letting me read your work
 - 2. This is what I liked
 - 3. This is what I wish could be different
 - 4. This is what I enjoyed about reading your work
 - a. This last one is more general
- C. Model Critique group interactions using the collaborative story about the bear.

IX. Critique students' work and make suggestions for improvement.

- 1. Line Edits
- 2. Sequencing

3. Hooks
4. Interest

X. Rewrite

- A. Save last story under a new date (Naming convention: TITLEYYMMDD, e.g. Paiute170715).
 1. Never throw away a story. May need to use parts of previous stories.
- B. Make grammatical and spelling changes suggested if they are correct.
- C. Consider other suggestions.
 1. Give the comments a chance to settle in. Even if you don't like them, consider them seriously.
 2. May or may not want to take critique's suggestions
 - a. Do they make sense?
 - b. Do they make the story better?
 - c. Do they agree with vision of the story or give a better vision?
 3. Most of the time if a critiquer says something doesn't work, it doesn't.

XI. Illustrations

- A. Have students use notes from the research to draw the setting and any animals, people in the story.
- B. If they use photographs, get permission if necessary and include attribution in bibliography.
- C. Public domain pictures don't need permission.

XII. Bibliography

- A. Have students develop a bibliography. While a bibliography is not published in a creative non-fiction story, writers must keep their bibliography and their source material in case writer's accuracy is questioned.
- B. Different school districts may require different styles. Below are sample Chicago Style entries.
 1. Book: Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
 2. Website: McDonald's Corporation. "McDonald's Happy Meal Toy Safety Facts." Accessed July 19, 2008. <http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/about/factsheets.html>.

XIII. Extend the Activity to Non-Fiction.

- A. Using the research developed for the creative non-fiction story, have students write a non-five-paragraph essay on rice grass or pine nuts is harvested and processed.