

STUDY GUIDE

THINKING *Units of Study* THROUGH *in Reading and Writing Workshops 4–12* GENRE



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THINKING THROUGH GENRE

Units of Study in Reading and Writing Workshops Grades 4–12

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Being able to read and write in a variety of genres is a common requirement for today's students. *Thinking Through Genre* supports English teachers who seek to engage their students in genre studies in the reading and writing workshop. The book profiles six different units of study: memoir, feature article, editorial, short story, fairy tale, and response to literature. Each unit is set in an individual fifth-through tenth-grade classroom and is described from its theoretical foundations, through the planning for the specific needs of the students, to the teaching, and finally evaluation.

This study guide is designed to help teachers discuss and put into practice some of the ideas in *Thinking Through Genre*. Sample questions for different chapters are provided, as well as activities to help participants collaborate around thorny issues like scheduling, finding time for genre study, and assessment.

Questions for Discussion After Reading the Chapters

CHAPTER 1: Teaching Genre in the Classroom

How are these genre-focused units of study in a workshop model similar to your current approach to teaching? How are they different?

What are the strengths of this approach? What are the weaknesses?

Discuss the link between reading and writing. Does linking reading and writing instruction through a focused genre make sense for your classroom? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 2: Memoir

CHAPTER 3: Feature Article

CHAPTER 4: Editorial

CHAPTER 5: Short Story

CHAPTER 6: Fairy Tale

CHAPTER 7: Response to Literature

For each genre explored in Chapters 2–7:

Describe your own experiences reading and writing in the genre.

What is your response to the chapter's introductory piece in the genre?

Do you think that this is an important genre to introduce to students? Why or why not?

What skills should students master in this genre in reading? in writing? Why? What is the lifelong importance of these skills?

Workshop Activities

Getting Started

These short activities can build the community around the book, and in small ways encourage participants to try new practices in their classrooms:

Read and discuss the genre sample with colleagues.

Teach one of the sample lessons—especially from Weeks 1 or 2—in reading workshop.

Read a variety of interesting texts within a single genre with students. Then discuss what these texts have in common, what their purpose is, and what makes them unique.

Write your own piece within the genre.

Teach one of the sample lessons—especially from Weeks 1 or 2—in writing workshop.

Discuss time constraints. Consider the sample schedule in Figure 1. Talk about different ways of revising or refining literacy schedules in your school.

Moving into a Full Genre Study

Once participants have tried a few quick workshop lessons or activities, they may want to try a more sustained genre workshop. Participants might want to try the same genre study together as a group, or they may choose to work alone or with a partner to test a variety of the genre studies described in the book.

Use Figures 2 and 3 to work through with colleagues what and how everyone will teach. These forms can be filled out silently or in teams during the study-group session and then discussed. Tell participants it's fine to leave sections blank if they are unsure—the group will work together to sort through questions about goals, assessments, and lessons as the genre workshops are discussed.

Here are some guidelines to help participants design a genre study:

Set goals

What do you want students to know and be able to do in reading and in writing by the end of this unit? How will you evaluate students' mastery of these skills?

Assess your students

What experience have students had with this genre? What skills do they currently have? What skills will they need to master? What are potential stumbling blocks that you might hit?

Plan a progression

Each chapter contains reading and writing instructional focus progression charts. How can these be adapted to fit the needs of your classroom?

Review resources

What resources do you currently have to support instruction in this genre? Are they engaging? Are they accessible for students? How might these resources best be used?

Plan lessons

How are the lessons in the chapter organized? How can these lessons be adapted and supplemented to fit the needs of your students and your classroom?

Plan for differentiated instruction to fit students' needs

What tools will you use to regularly assess student understanding (reader response journals, writing conferences, and so on)? How will you support stu-

dents who are struggling with certain concepts and/or students who need to be pushed further?

Cover your bases

How does instruction in this genre meet the expectations of your state and/or district?

Reading and Writing Check

Once participants have completed an initial design, use Figure 3 to make sure there is a range of reading and writing opportunities for students.

1. Does the genre study ensure plenty of sustained reading time? This is a particular concern during units built around non-narrative text such as editorial, feature article, and response to literature. Study in these units does not always lend itself to sustained reading time. This is understandable—when proficient readers read expository text, they read for a purpose; few sit down daily for an extended period with a magazine of literary criticism or a collection of editorials.

The opportunities we create in the classroom should reflect authentic habits. Time needs to be devoted everyday for students to read text of their choice, but the material need not be tied to the genre or the strategies in the unit. This is especially true for students who are reading below grade level. Although deep and direct instruction around genres is important for all students, the most important thing we can do, especially for struggling students, is to get and keep them reading.

2. Does the genre study ensure regular writing opportunities? Although the genre-based writing piece that students are working toward publishing is the main writing assignment for the unit, it should not be the only writing assignment. Students need regular opportunities to write within the genre.

These opportunities may come from common prompts, through informal entries in students' writing notebooks, or through the development of multiple "seed" ideas. Some teachers have successfully used timed writings, setting aside twenty to thirty minutes once or twice each week for students to write within the genre. Regular practice provides students with increased confidence in their writing abilities, reinforces the lessons that they are learning and applying to their published pieces, and often prompts new insights into both the genre and the writing process.

Figure 1

Sample Schedule for 90-Minute Periods	
45 minutes	Genre-Based Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four to six week units of study• Units are standards-based• During each study: focus is initially on reading within genre; focus moves to writing within genre as study progresses• Units balanced between fiction and nonfiction genres• Workshop may include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mini-lesson (read-aloud, shared reading)Guided practiceIndependent applicationShare/debrief
35 minutes	Reading Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing throughout the year• Student choice of text: subject and genre• Instructional focus on reading strategies• Most instruction takes place through targeted small-group lessons or one-to-one conferring• Workshop may include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Extended independent reading and conferringBook clubs/literature circlesGuided reading groupsOccasional mini-lessons
10 minutes	Word Study <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing throughout the year• Instructional focus may include multiple aspects of word study (making meaning in context, developing concept knowledge, using prefixes, suffixes, and roots, and so on) based on student's needs• Study may include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Study of words and/or concepts using graphic organizers (see <i>Words, Words, Words</i> by Janet Allen [1999, Stenhouse])Word games (Scattergories, Taboo, Pictionary, etc.)Student-developed word banks

Figure 2

Designing Genre Workshops	
Goals:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Assessment:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Resources:	
Progression:	
Reading Goals	Writing Goals
Weeks 1–2	
Weeks 3–4	
Weeks 5–6	
Notes for lessons:	
Notes for differentiation:	
Notes for standards/district requirements:	

