

Writing Without Boundaries

What's Possible When
Students Combine Genres

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Units of Study and Multigenre Writing

In her early years of teaching multigenre writing, Suzette did not begin from a research paper approach; instead she looked at what already existed in her curriculum and found ways to use multigenre writing to expand students' understanding of historical figures and events. She felt it was important to begin slowly and add on to her already existing units of study. She asked herself, "Where in my curriculum would multigenre writing fit? And what units of study already exist that would lend themselves to multigenre writing?"

In the previous chapters we outlined a typical approach to multigenre writing, meaning it follows in many ways the descriptions of multigenre writing by Tom Romano (2000), Camille Allen (2001), and Melinda Putz (2006). In this chapter we move from Suzette's curricular quest and expand the repertoire of multigenre writing and describe ways of entering into this type of writing from a more direct connection to existing curriculum units of study.

Multigenre writing has historically been presented as an alternative to the traditional research paper, but it can also enhance existing units of study. In this chapter we outline four units of study in which multigenre writing is a powerful extension to students' understanding of topic and genre. The first unit of study is a persuasive speech unit with a focus on historical figures and biography; the second is a unit of study focusing on biography in the primary grades; the third is a unit on the Revolutionary War; and the fourth is a focus on multigenre writing as a response to literature.

Balloon Speech (Biography and Persuasive Writing)

This unit of study spans across the reading and writing workshop as well as into the social studies curriculum. It is an in-depth study of historical events and people as well as a study of persuasive writing, research, debate skills, public speaking, and multigenre writing. Another description of this unit can also be found in *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days* (Serafini and Serafini Youngs 2006). In this unit students are asked to choose a historical figure and research him or her in depth.

This is the scenario students receive:

Choose a person real or fictional to become. You will research this person in depth and become this person in every way possible. Then imagine you are stranded on a deserted island and there is only one way off the island: a balloon that will take you and four other people to another island where one final balloon is waiting for you. This balloon will carry only one person back to civilization. In

order to be the sole survivor, you must convince a panel of people (the audience the night of the speeches) that you are the most important and influential person in the world. You must convince the audience that you should be the one to survive. If you do not survive, you and all of your contributions to the world will never have existed at all.

You will write a five-minute speech to convince the audience that who you are and all your contributions are so important that you must be the sole person to get back to civilization. You will research the other people in your balloon and use that information in a debate against your balloonmates to decide who the most important person is. You will give your speech and have one minute for rebuttal, the audience will vote, and a balloon winner will be declared. Good luck!

The unit begins with a two-week in-depth search for just the right person. Students and teacher venture to the local library for research materials and interview parents and other family members and friends to get personal reactions to the historical figures they are considering. Here is a sampling of the people children have chosen over the years.

Thomas Jefferson	Abigail Adams	FDR
Ben Franklin	Oprah Winfrey	Rudolph Giuliani
George Washington	Santa Claus	John Elway
Abraham Lincoln	Celine Dion	Rosa Parks
Henry Ford	Sojourner Truth	George W. Bush
Albert Einstein	J. K. Rowling	a child
Bill Clinton	a mom	Jane Goodall
Bill Gates	Hillary Clinton	Alexander Graham Bell
Don McLean	Amelia Earhart	Lance Armstrong
NYC firefighter	Suzan B. Anthony	Walt Disney
JFK	Rachael Carson	Joan of Ark
Gandhi	Princess Diana	Anne Frank
Leonardo da Vinci	Harriet Tubman	Diane Fossey
Martin Luther King Jr.	an engineer	Chuck Yeager
J. R. R. Tolkien	a teacher	Clara Barton
Jim Carrey	Mother Teresa	Sadako
Ernest Shackleton	Anne Sullivan	Vincent van Gogh
Mickey Mouse	Eve	Galileo
the Devil	Shirley Temple	Elvis
the Grim Reaper	Easter Bunny	Teddy Roosevelt
Jesus	a pediatrician	Madam Curie
Dr. Charles Drew	Mother Nature	Helen Keller
Dalai Lama	Lance Burton	Mozart
Coretta Scott King	Christopher Reeves	
Ruby Bridges	God	

Once each student chooses her person, the teacher collects the names and places them into a hat. The teacher then pulls out five names at a time to form balloon groups. Students are very eager to form groups as it sets their research agenda and they then know the identities of their competitors. The teacher begins a series of lessons on research skills, critical reading, persuasive writing, public speaking, and debate skills.

Single-Genre Study: Persuasive Writing

All efforts are placed on a common genre—a persuasive speech. The teacher provides a sample outline for students to follow. It has particular required sections but the order is up to the student. Students must include an opening; pertinent background information including childhood, schooling, and adult life; at least five contributions to society; research information on the other four members of their group; a closing; and a prepared rebuttal. All students begin with the same genre but focus on different times in history and current events. Their speech is written in the first person and tells the life of their person. Students spend two weeks researching their historical figure and their opponents' figures. Students have the option of switching back and forth from opponents to their own figure, giving them some freedom during the writing workshop time.

For some students it is a daunting task to research four or five people, so investigative groups are formed to give support to their research efforts. In this group, four students team up and research the other opponent, plan a team effort, and divide up the information for their speeches. Students rotate until all figures have been researched. They are all sworn to secrecy, as they do not want the other person to know what information they have found out about his figure. For example, in one group Harriet Tubman, Santa Claus, and Ernest Shackleton worked together to research Hillary Clinton. Once they completed their research and divided the information, then Hillary Clinton, Santa Claus, and Harriet Tubman worked together to research Ernest Shackleton, and the rotation continued until all opponents had been researched.

In many cases it is not about finding negative attributes but rather about comparing major contributions and weighing the impact the contributions had on society. Students look closely at historical, world, and current events and compare the effects and impact each person has had on society. The writing of the speech is based on a person's contribution but students also have an understanding of the impact of the historical events of the time as well.

The unit of study at this point is very similar to any genre study, as described in Chapter 2. Students are exposed to a variety of examples of persuasive speeches, they explore and critically read and watch videos of the contents of these speeches, and then they begin to experiment with their own persuasive speech writing. Students spend about a month in preparation for the balloon speeches. They research their person, investigate (dig up the dirt, as Suzette's students like to call it) their opponents, practice impromptu speeches, create an outline, and then write their speech and experiment with various openings and closings to their speech.

As students prepare their speech, they begin to see their person from a variety of perspectives. They understand the major contributions he or she has made, but they also understand mistakes their person has made and to try and defend them and explain why their person might have done what he or she did. They also understand

how other historical figures and characters might have perceived their person's actions. Not only do students write from their perspective and create arguments against their opponents, but also they must predict what their opponents might say about them. What arguments would come from these other perspectives? Using the earlier example, they need to think: What would Ernest Shackleton, Santa Claus, and Harriet Tubman say about Hillary Clinton? The information gathered is then used in their argument or rebuttal section.

By considering these multiple perspectives on their historical figure, students have a true advantage when it comes to the multigenre writing project, as they can imagine what writing this person might do and what writing might have been created about him or her. In order to prepare for the speech they need to predict what another historical figure might say and imagine how their figure's actions would be perceived. In many cases the balloons are filled with figures from different time periods and sometimes the figures are from a fictional world. Here are some of the groupings that have occurred in Suzette's classroom over the years.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Sojourner Truth	a teacher	Easter Bunny
J. K. Rowling	Albert Einstein	a mom
George Washington	Thomas Jefferson	Santa Claus
Rudolph Giuliani	Thomas Edison	a pediatrician
Group 4	Group 5	
Mickey Mouse	Christopher Reeves	
Martin Luther King Jr.	God	
Gandhi	FDR	
Mother Nature	Spongebob Squarepants	
Lance Burton		

On the night of the speeches, parents, friends, and family attend the big event. Each student gives a speech and then takes notes on the other speeches to prepare for her one-minute rebuttal. After students have given their speeches, they each have one minute to say something in defense of what has been said about their figure, a new point to consider or a reminder of their person's major contributions. There are five to seven rounds of speeches. At the end of each balloon group, the audience votes. At the end of all the rounds, the winners are announced and then a dinner break occurs to allow the finalists time to prepare for their final speeches. At the end of the evening a winner is declared (see Figure 5.1 for an excerpt of a Mother Teresa speech).

FIGURE 5.1
Excerpt from Mother Teresa Speech

What gives you the greatest joy in life? To me it is seeing a homeless child laugh or to hear a dying man's last words be "thank you" because we rescued him from the streets. To find out how I (Mother Teresa) came to rescue children and dying men and women we have to go many years back to my childhood. I was born in Skopje, Yugoslavia. I had an older brother and sister. . . I love to give children a smile and to be their friend so I started homes for abandoned children.

From Persuasive Writing to Multiple Genres

Once the speeches are completed students begin to consider multiple genres from their person's perspective. They consider genres that would have been appropriate for their person and they consider the perspective and who should be writing the piece. Students understand so much about their historical person that typically they focus their research efforts on investigating possible genres. Students keep their resources so they have a quick reference once they begin to write if further research is necessary.

The teacher brainstorms possible genres with the students. In a class discussion students share the kinds of writing each historical person created and the impact the writing had on society. In many cases it is very obvious, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech; Abigail Adams' letters to John Adams; Thomas Jefferson's writings and contribution to the Constitution; and Hillary Clinton's speeches as first lady and as senator. In other cases it is more difficult, and students need to imagine what writing or speeches the Grim Reaper might give, for example, or what Mickey Mouse might write. Students who want to write through more modern genres like a PowerPoint presentation, a web page, or a magazine article need only to consider the perspective and think authentically about who might create a genre *about* their person.

The talk in the classroom during this time is about finding the most authentic pieces of writing that a historical person would have created or someone would have created about the person. All students are entering into the multigenre writing from the same perspective, as the persuasive speech is the foundation of their project.

Small-Group Investigations

Investigative groups can be formed based on the time period each person is from, common causes and contributions, or common and different genres. The biography focus allows a teacher to investigate genres and people as they connect to other historical or fictional characters because of the nature of the multigenre writing. As students prepare their rebuttal and argument, they are connecting historical and fictional characters in unique ways. The scenario of placing characters pulled from different time periods on an island allows students to make connections to other characters and the conversations they might have. This understanding of historical figures is in depth as they are able to apply their understanding out of the context of a particular time period.

Investigating Time Period

Each student creates his own time line of his person, choosing which historical events are most pertinent. Figure 5.2 showcases part of a time line for the Dalai Lama. Then, on the board or on chart paper, the class creates one large time line and places all the individual historical time lines on it.

To clarify time periods, each person can be a different color. This gives the class an understanding of each person in history and creates a visual representation of the time period when these historical people were the most influential. Students are placed into small groups based on the time line and overlapping dates. If too many students are in one time period, then it will be necessary to form a few smaller groups. In this manner students discuss the major events of the time period

FIGURE 5.2
Time line for the Dalai Lama

Dalai Lama Time Line	
1935	The Dalai Lama was born in the province of Amdo near the Chinese border.
1938	The Tibetan government sent a search party and found the Dalai Lama. He is taken to Lhasa the capital of Tibet.
1940	The Dalai Lama was taken to Potala Palace and proclaimed the official Dalai Lama. He was then educated at a monastery in Lhasa.
1950	The Chinese start to invade. They take over the Amdo and others near border provinces. The Chinese use their military power to take over all of Tibet in the next 9 years. They torture people and systematically take over.

FIGURE 5.3
Time Period Genre Discussion Guide

Time Period Genre Discussion Guide	
Time Period: From year _____ to year _____	
Genres used by your historical person:	
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Genres typical for that time period:	
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Genres you might like to try:	
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

and the kinds of writing and public speaking that were common during that time. Students are given a guide sheet to help them begin this type of discussion (see Figure 5.3). At first the discussion is on major events in history rather than genre, but that is just a way of grouping. Once the groups are formed, students begin to discuss historical genres.

During the discussion of historical genres students share information gained during the research phase and share with each other the genres used by their historical figure and genres from the time period that each student discovered. For example, Figure 5.4 shows a completed time period guide on Abigail Adams.

Lauren’s historical figure was Abigail Adams and as can be seen by her completed guide sheet, she was familiar with Abigail’s letters to her husband, John Adams.

Time Period Genre Discussion Guide

Abigail Adams

Time period: From year: 1744 To year: 1818

1764 - married John Adams

Genres used by your historical person:

<u>letters to husband</u>	<u>As first lady</u>
<u>letters to Mercy Chs Warren</u>	<u>travel to Europe</u>
_____	_____

Genres typical for that time period:

<u>ournals</u>	<u>declarations</u>
<u>letters</u>	<u>newspapers</u>
<u>speeches</u>	<u>diarys</u>
<u>Bills</u>	<u>treaties</u>

Genres I might like to try:

<u>speech</u>	_____
<u>declaration</u>	_____
<u>letters</u>	_____
_____	_____

FIGURE 5.4
Time Period Genre Guide on
Abigail Adams

Lauren wanted her writing to be authentic and so in this group, the students discussed the role of women during that time period. She needed this understanding to help her imagine other genres Abigail might use authentically. Following is part of their conversation:

LAUREN: Abigail wrote letters to her husband. What if she wrote them to other people?

HEATHER: Who would she write to?

JOHN: Other women.

LAUREN: Why only women?

JOHN: Other men are not going to read her letters and if they do they are not going to take her seriously because she is a woman.

HEATHER: Yeah, Martha Washington was expected to give parties and to receive guests, not really make major decisions.

The purpose of discussion in these groups is to investigate what genres are available and for students to discover which genres could communicate information about their person most effectively. When groups complete their discussion, the teacher meets with the whole class to discuss what the students discovered during these group conversations. The teacher might ask:

- ❖ What new genres did you discover?
- ❖ How did the time period impact the genres?
- ❖ Are there genres that span across all time periods?
- ❖ What genres are specific to the time period?
- ❖ What genres do you want to try?

Students then have time to think about their proposal and to write down ideas about new and interesting genres in their writer's notebook.

Common Causes and Contributions

Another way to organize students for brainstorming genres and topics for writing is to group them by their figures' contributions. On a sheet of chart paper, list all of the causes and major contributions made by each person. Then have the class discuss ways to organize the groups. This is an interesting discussion to have as they make connections across time periods. For example, during one discussion, students felt that Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Oprah Winfrey, Hillary Clinton, and Abraham Lincoln should be in the same group because they fought for the equal rights of women and African Americans. Through their discussion they realized that the means these people had to pursue their fights for equal rights were not equal due to time period, gender, power position (status), and financial status.

How to group is a very interesting and powerful discussion to have with children. Again they begin to understand historical events in a deeper manner but they also begin to understand the time period and as efforts transcend time, they see the threads of contributions of people in earlier times.

During these groups students begin the conversation around major contributions and then they discuss the genres used as avenues to reach and persuade other citizens. To facilitate this conversation, the teacher uses a guide sheet for this small-group investigation (see Figure 5.5). Each student fills out her own sheet and uses the information from the discussion to make decisions for the multigenre writing project. For an example of a completed form on Oprah Winfrey, see Figure 5.6.

These small-group investigations take about a week to complete. During this time students are given a multigenre writing proposal and asked to consider four to seven more pieces to write, depending on the time available. The proposal is similar to the one in Chapter 3 except the topic explanation is eliminated. Students focus their attention on the genres and describe the authenticity of their pieces, once again answering the question—Why does this piece exist?

Genre Groups

Once students have completed their proposal and are ready to begin drafting, genre groups are formed in the same way as described in Chapter 4. Students meet with the

Major Contribution Discussion Guide

Name:

Major Contributions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Genres used:

What other genres could this person have used?

What genres will help the reader to get a complete understanding of this person and his or her contributions to society?

FIGURE 5.5

Major Contribution Discussion Guide

teacher and preview many examples; explore the genres with critical reading; and experiment with their own writing. Depending on need, the teacher can group students based on common genres or have them investigate similarities and differences among genres. Students then revise, edit, and publish their multigenre writing projects (see Figure 5.7 for a fourth-grade example of a completed multigenre writing project centered on Ben Franklin).

Parents are invited to the celebration, as they are eager to see the expansion on students' understanding of their historical figures since the night of their presentation of the balloon speeches. Multigenre writing projects are shared with reading buddies and administrators who would like to attend the celebration.

In the next section we present another biography unit of study, for primary-grade students. Students begin with writing a biography and then venture into writing two pieces and creating a visual element to extend their writing.

FIGURE 5.6
Major Contribution Discussion Guide
on Oprah Winfrey

Major contribution discussion guide

Name: *Oprah Winfrey*

Major contributions:

- 1. power position for African American woman*
- 2. talk show for people to get help*
- 3. give away many things*
- 4. Bring awareness to important topics*
- 5. promotes reading*

Genres used:

speech talk show
recipes
books
journal
letters

What other genres could this person have used?

image address
memories
picture book
song book

What genres will help the reader to get a complete understanding of this person and their contributions to society?

ABC book
journal entries from people she's helped
TV show
letters from family on childhood

Primary Focus on Biography

In the primary grades it almost seems natural to use multigenre writing, as the children are eager to learn about various ways to write. As teachers engage students in their first research projects, they spend considerable energy showing students the places to search for information, how to represent it, and how to prepare a report for others to read. Once these reports are complete, teachers often move on to another research report topic. We are suggesting that before such a move, teachers allow students to build on their knowledge about a topic and expand their report into a multigenre project. The teacher can capitalize on students' knowledge of the topic and expand their writing repertoires and venture into other genres that connect to the person or topic. The routines are essentially the same as those engaged in by intermediate students. Teachers may just need to scaffold the projects a bit more. For instance, they may need to be more explicit about each genre possibility that they model for students.

One way to enter into multigenre writing is to move from a single-genre study of biography in the primary grades to a multigenre project. For example, students in first-, second-, and third-grade classrooms were studying about important figures in history. Their teacher provided numerous books and other resources for students to

FIGURE 5.7
Ben Franklin Project

Oct. 9, 1715

Dear Friend,

I apologize for what happened today. I know you had your opinions, and I had mine, and I'm sorry your opinion was undoubtedly wrong.

It is absurd to think that wind is created inside the clouds. It is only too obvious that wind is formed far above earth by the wings of many birds.

Wind is strong enough to move the clouds, for if the wind came from the cloud itself the cloud would be propelled in the opposite direction of the cloud. However, a cloud travels with the wind, not against it.

I'm sure you're on the right track now, unless you've got evidence to prove me wrong. If so, please write back!

Your friend,
Ben Franklin

May 10, 1775

Another negotiation meeting down the drain. You would think that the stupid people would stop charging us so much for tea. What's the deal here, I mean why shouldn't we have our independence, why are we being taxed for things like the wood we chop for our own houses? If war ever breaks out, which I am sure it will, how will we defend ourselves? It would take everyone here to fight their army, I don't even want to think about it. . . .

Ben's Haiku Poem

Hear the frightening sound
The thunder is almighty
Stay out of its way!

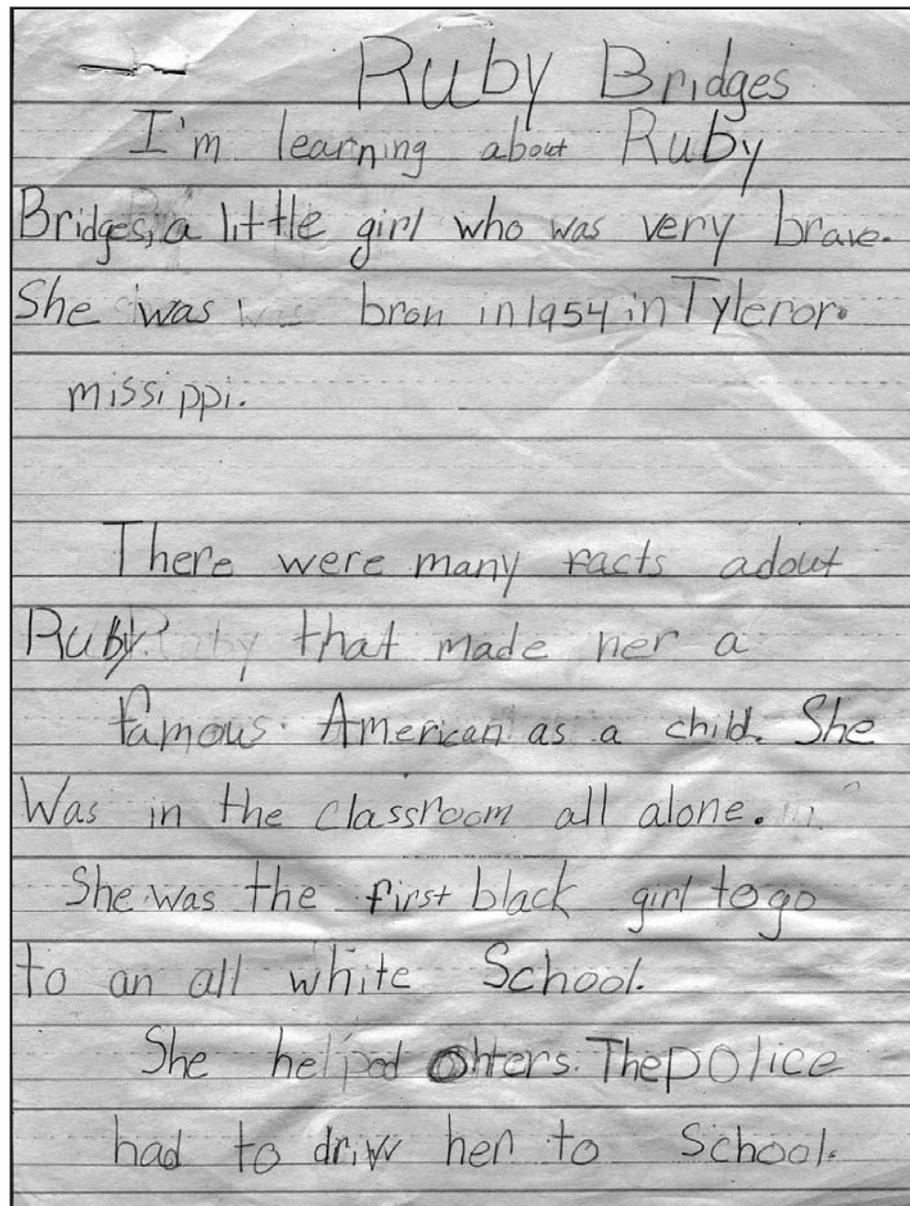
Wow, what a big storm
Hey, is that a kite up there?
Boom, crash, oh poor Ben!

Here little kitty,
Stay indoors till the storm's through
Zap! Well I warned you!

explore. Their first activity was to write a traditional report about their person. In Figure 5.8 is second grader Chandler's writing about Ruby Bridges. Her report includes important facts and also some personal opinion, such as where she writes about Ruby "being lucky." Building from this report are a couple of samples from her multigenre project on Ruby Bridges. The first multigenre example is a letter (see Figure 5.9) written to Ruby from Sally. Chandler provided an introduction to her letter that explained who the letter was from. A final sample is an excerpt from Ruby's journal that allowed the reader to experience Ruby's feelings (see Figure 5.10).

This sample project provides evidence that multigenre writing is an appropriate vehicle for even the youngest writers. Through its use, young children understand various genres and how they can work together to enrich classroom study.

FIGURE 5.8
Chandler's Biography of Ruby Bridges



Revolutionary War Multigenre Writing Projects

There are countless places within the curriculum where multigenre writing can be used to expand students' understanding of topic and genre. It is exciting to think of the possibilities for this kind of writing. Students and teacher can engage in an in-depth study of history or science and then use multigenre writing as a culminating experience to the unit. This kind of writing requires students to think about history or science topics from a variety of perspectives and to imagine ways to express their understanding of science and social studies concepts.

We would like to share with you one example of a Revolutionary War unit conducted in Suzette's and Ali's fifth-grade classrooms. The objectives for the unit were for students to understand the dates and major events surrounding the start, dura-

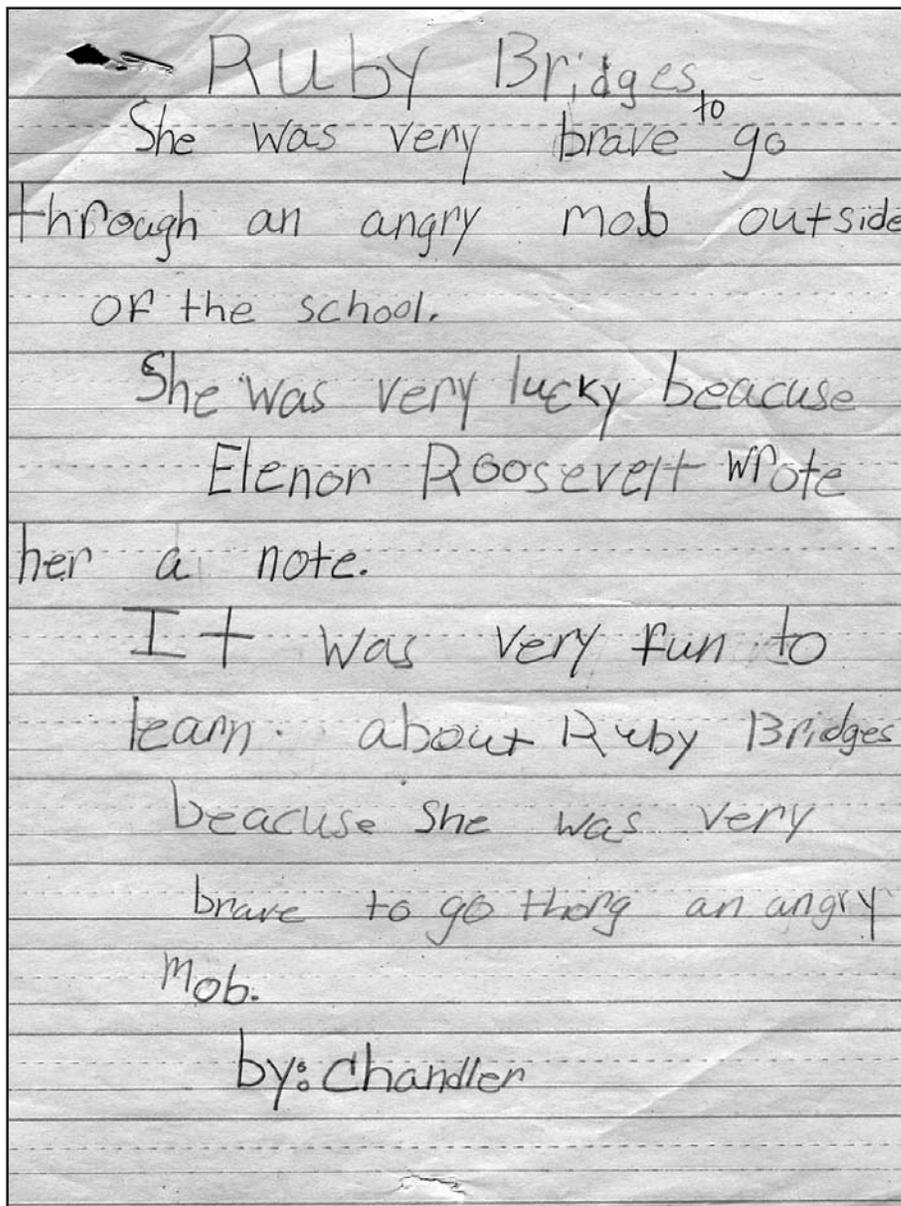


FIGURE 5.8
(continued)

tion, and ending of the Revolutionary War; to know the names of major historical figures; to understand the impact the war had on the creation of the United States; and finally to understand the war from a variety of perspectives.

Overview of the Unit

This unit is a preplanned curricular unit based on state and district standards. In fifth grade the major focus for the social studies curriculum is American history. This Revolutionary War unit follows the structure of most units, where the reading and writing workshop are used together to expand students' understanding of historical events. In this unit all students are engaged in the study of the same events; it is a whole-class study and then multigenre writing becomes the culminating activity to allow for student choice, voice, and expression of views on the war.

FIGURE 5.9
Sally's Letter

This is a letter from Sally. She is a little girl standing outside Ruby's school. Her parents are protesting. She wants to go back to school with Ruby.

September 28, 1960
Dear RUBY,

How are you doing
in school? Would it
Be scaery to Be
you? Ruby I think
No other girl would
say this but I
want to go back
to school with you.
I Disagree with my
parents. parents Don't
Want kids to go school
just because of your
skin color. It's really
boring at home. I would
Love to Be with you and
miss Henry. plus I don't
have a Brother or
sister. When I stand
Here in the crowd with
my parents I Here
this word going thro
my Head "Ruby we hate you"

Exposure and Exploration

For this unit there was a great concern with how children, slaves, patriots, loyalists, and King George viewed the war. So as Suzette's and Ali's classes learned about the war, the teachers made sure to include a variety of perspectives on similar events. They created a class time line to record different events and battles as learned by either the whole class or individuals. The focus began with the events that led up to the war and a study of the major historical people involved. Through the use of read-alouds, guided and shared reading and writing, literature study groups, and investigative groups, children gained a broad understanding of the war.

FIGURE 5.9
(continued)

Ruby We hate
you those words going
thore my Head over
and over again.
Watching you walk thore
the Door over and over
again I am eager to yell
"Whats what's wrong with
you people? She is an excellent
girl! Ruby Who cares about
your skin color? I just
care about us being
friends. Maybe the protesting
will stop and we can
be friends and go back to
school to gether.

Love, Sally

Read-Alouds

The unit began with a series of read-alouds on the Revolutionary War (see Appendix B for a list of children's literature used). The teachers used read-alouds to engage students in whole-class discussions of events and stories of the war. They read aloud picture books of historical fiction as well as informational texts and then made them available for students to read again. It was important to explore a variety of genres so children could understand what each genre brought to the topic. They completed an impressions, connections, and wonderings chart (see Chapter 3) for every book read and posted them around the room for reference to their developing understandings of a variety of perspectives on the war. Students also read other books in small groups and completed their own ICW charts.

Each student also kept a literature response log, where they recorded their personal reactions to the books read as a whole group, in pairs, or independently. The structure for these entries was the same as the ICW chart completed as a whole class. In their writer's notebook students recorded their thoughts on the Revolutionary War.

FIGURE 5.10
Ruby's Journal Entry

Oct. 14, 1960

Today was a little
Better ~~than~~ yesterday
Today was spent
a little more time
with Miss Henry
Because there's
no one else here.
Though I wish
There was someone
to play jump rope
with.
I stopped and said my
prayer for all those
people who were out-
There protesting.
I forgive them God.
Please let all this end
soon.

Ruby

These entries would later be seeds of writing for their multigenre writing project. For an example, see Figure 5.11, which displays Michaun's journal entry.

Shared and Guided Reading and Writing

The reading for a unit like this can be difficult for many readers. To support their efforts in understanding, students read expository texts in guided reading groups and as a whole class and conducted shared reading of primary sources such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. During an intensive study of these historic documents, writers get a sense of the language and structure of the documents so they may emulate this style in their own writing. In this investigation the teachers conducted a shared (slow) reading of the Declaration of Independence. Students struggled with vocabulary and sentence length and structure. This style was very different from anything they had experienced before. Once students had a good

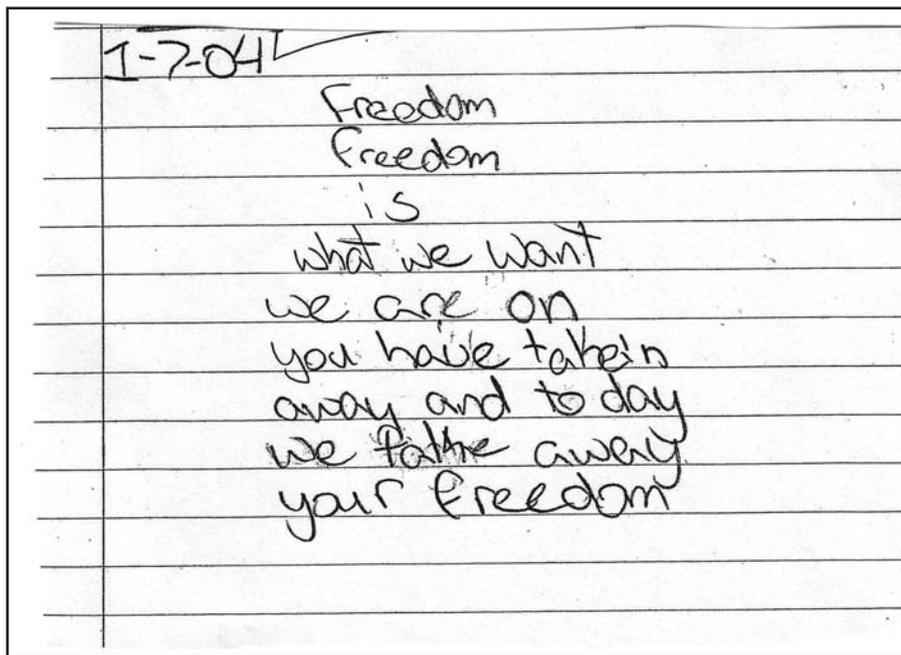


FIGURE 5.11
Michaun's Journal Entry

understanding of the Declaration of Independence the teachers placed them into groups of four and gave each group a section of it to rewrite in their own words. The classes then put it together, dipped it in tea, and hung it in the room for future reading and reference.

Literature Study Groups

To be sure students were exposed to a wide variety of genres, Suzette and Ali formed literature study groups based on the children's area of interest and the books they were interested in reading. Students joined one of seven groups to read historical fiction novels based on the Revolutionary War time period. Those readers who struggled more with the text were supported in one of the following ways: paired reading, a book on CD, or teacher or parent read-aloud at home. All children regardless of reading ability were involved with a book of their choice and were expected to discuss personal responses, the text, the genre, and their understanding of the Revolutionary War in a literature discussion group.

The reading and writing workshops were utilized for whole-class, small-group, and individual investigation. Students read and wrote to enhance their understanding of the Revolutionary War. All the literacy events that led to their eventual multigenre writing projects were important because these events were the foundation for the multigenre writing project. Students were exposed to a variety of genres: poetry, historical fiction, letters, journal entries, primary source documents, expository texts, informational texts, and an array of textbooks. During class discussions students analyzed the variety of genres and how each added to their understanding of this historical time.

Focus on Perspectives

During this unit a major focus was to learn about the war from a variety of perspectives so children would have an understanding of history from different viewpoints.

Ultimately these multiple lenses on history would lend themselves to the writers so they would have a variety of perspectives to choose from when doing their multigenre writing projects.

To transition into multigenre writing, Suzette began with another read-aloud of *Crossing the Delaware: History in Many Voices* (Peacock 1998). This is an interesting picture book telling the events of Washington's crossing of the Delaware. Peacock used three distinctive genres to tell the story—letters, expository and narrative writing, and actual journal entries from officers in the war. Peacock used letter writing to illustrate what a soldier and his girlfriend might converse about and to provide details of events and personal feelings about the war. She also used excerpts from journal entries created by officers in the war and threaded the piece together using a narrative description of the events after a modern-day visit to the House of Decisions as she imagined and recounted what happened there. The use of the three genres is compelling as it provides a layered effect on the reader's understanding of the events surrounding the historic crossing of the Delaware.

Choosing a Focus

Students needed to choose a focus. Even though the focus was much narrower than the research approach, the possibilities were still very broad under the topic of the Revolutionary War. Students needed to decide whether they were going to focus on a historic person, battle, event, or group of people. Students spent two days reviewing the past weeks of classroom research and activities to decide on an interesting focus for their project. The following is a list of possibilities for students to use as their focus:

Paul Revere	George Washington	King George
Martha Washington	patriot child	Loyalist child
Paul Revere's Midnight Ride	slave	Thomas Jefferson
Thomas Jefferson's horse	gun maker	a Hessian soldier
fictitious soldier	Battle of Bunker Hill	Battle of Yorktown
Mrs. Revere	Crossing the Delaware	John Hancock
Revolutionary researcher	Monopoly game board maker	Redcoat soldier

Choosing Perspectives

Once students chose their focus they decided what their perspective was going to be. Students could write from one perspective (e.g., George Washington—all the pieces would be written by George Washington), or they could choose to write from a variety of perspectives (e.g., letters to George from Martha, journal entries by George, letters sent by messenger to the battlefield, correspondence from an English leader demanding a surrender, etc.). Through the experimentation with perspectives, students' choices expanded, as did their understanding of the war. Figure 5.12 displays Will's thinking about the perspective he would use in his letter. Following his decision-making process is his letter from George Washington (see Figure 5.13).

In order to write the letter, Will needed to understand both the details of the Battle of Lexington and Molly Pitcher's involvement, as well as the tone of the letter that George might have written in.

I am doing a death letter from the perspective of George Washington to a family named the James Family. I am writing this because I am studying about the Revolutionary War and in wars people die.

FIGURE 5.12
Will's Thinking

Dear Mr. and Mrs. James,

Your son Archie James has been shot in the Battle of Lexington. When the British shot most of our men went and burned down the city of Lexington. I took the time to write this letter because he was like a son to me. He was one of my strongest and most favorite men in the army. When he was shot Molly Pitcher saw him and gasped, "Oh, No!" When she saw that there was nobody around she picked him up on her shoulder and yelled, "Help, Someone Help," and no one responded. After there was no response she ran for safety with him on her shoulder. When they were out of danger she set him down and went to get help. Unfortunately Molly and her help returned too late and your son did not make it. I am very sorry.

Sincerely,

George Washington

FIGURE 5.13
Will's Letter from George Washington

As students worked through making these writerly decisions, they were ready to complete their multigenre writing proposal; students decided their focus, perspective, audience, reason for the genre to exist, and purpose for each writing piece. Because of the time period, the genres students wrote in were limited. Many students used letters, journals, newspaper articles, epitaphs, poetry, and battle plans, as they were authentic genres of the time.

Ali gave her students an opportunity to inquire about a genre they were unfamiliar with to expand their understanding. She created a form for them to fill out that asked them to identify the genre they wanted to learn more about, the perspective, and the audience and then asked students to record what information they already knew about the topic and books used to locate that information. See Figure 5.14 for Berto's use of this form as he explored a protest sign.

Once students decided their perspective, some investigative groups were formed to help students make decisions about genre or to help them develop the content of their writing pieces.

Investigative Groups

As students chose their focus and perspective, they used investigative groups to discuss and understand the variety of perspectives and opinions about the war. Students were very detailed in their content as they referred to historic places and dates. We will describe just one investigative group because the groups formed during the balloon speech project apply to this investigation as well.

Position on the War

The very nature of the Revolutionary War created a variety of positions and perspectives about the conflict. Therefore two investigative groups were formed to explore the opinions people had about the war and the genres they used and might have used to express these feelings. First, students were grouped by the opposing or differing viewpoints their topic or person of focus had on the war. For example, one

FIGURE 5.14
Berto's Exploration of a Protest Sign

Name Berto

Writing piece I want to get a better background for
Protest Poster (genre)

Perspective Sons of Liberty

Audience King G. III and to all the loyalists.

What information I can use
All the rude stuff the British
did to the patriots like taking their food
and like taking over their houses
and taxing them and how
they took everybody that they found
prisoners for nothing that they even
did just because they wanted to.

Books I used to find this info
Red coats and Petticoats

group consisted of King George, a patriot child, a slave, a black soldier, a patriot soldier, and the Battle of Lexington (see Figure 5.15 for the discussion guide sheet on two of these perspectives).

In this group students filled out the top portion before coming to the group. Then students were prepared to discuss the opinions their perspective or person would have about the war, possible genres used to express these ideas, and then decisions for their own multigenre writing piece. Second, students were grouped by similar perspectives on the war and again discussed the opinions and variety of genres that were available to them.

During these groups students expanded their understanding of the Revolutionary War, genres used during that time, and genre possibilities for their writing. This genre lens on historic events afforded children a very different conversation about the war as they discussed *how* people were able to record events, correspond with each other, and communicate directions and opinions effectively.

Opposing viewpoints of the Revolutionary War
Discussion Guide

Focus: <u>slave</u>	<u>patriot child</u>
Opinions of war:	
<u>confused</u>	<u>loyal to parents</u>
<u>hypocritical</u>	<u>scared of war</u>
<u>hopeful for their own</u>	<u>aid for others</u>
<u>freedom</u>	<u>children who must leave</u>
Genres used to express these opinions:	
<u>song</u>	<u>journals</u>
<u>prayer</u>	<u>games</u>
<u>stories</u>	<u>books</u>
	<u>prayers</u>
Genres I might like to try:	
<u>journals</u>	<u>journal</u> <u>letters</u>
<u>poetry</u>	<u>story</u> <u>poetry</u>
<u>story</u>	<u>news article</u>
<u>obituary</u>	<u>jump rope rhyme</u>

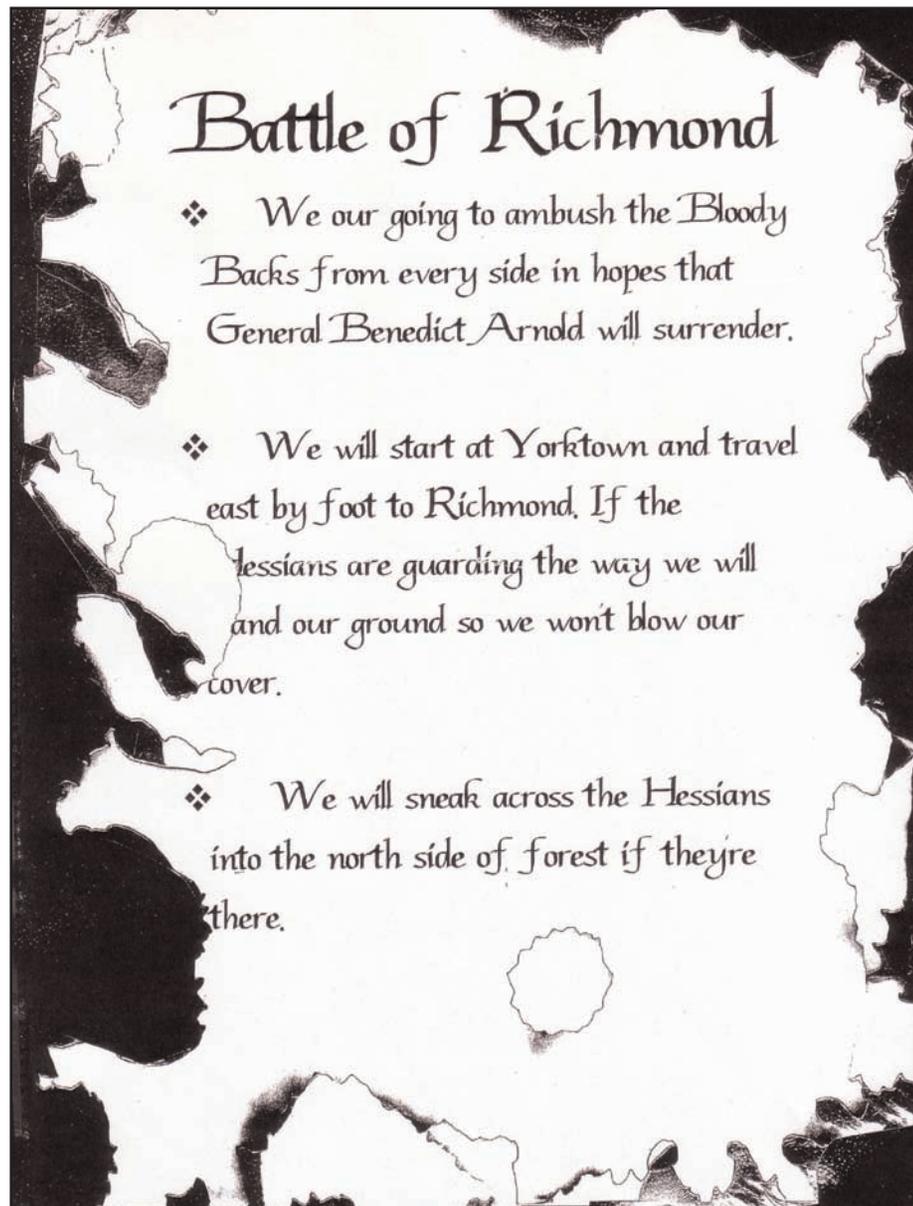
FIGURE 5.15
Opposing Viewpoints of the
Revolutionary War Discussion Guide

Drafting Multigenre Projects

As students completed their writing proposals, they began to draft their writing pieces utilizing all the multigenre activities listed previously. They explored genres; critically read; defined and experimented with genres; conducted peer conferences; and revised, edited, and published the projects.

We now share samples from one completed project. Figure 5.16 displays a few parts of Jamie's project. He chose to focus on a fictitious soldier he named Mike Snag. His pieces included battle plans he received from George Washington, a death letter to Mike Snag's family, and the obituary as it appeared in the newspaper. When exploring this project, it was evident that Jamie was thoughtful about the content, appropriate genres, and his project's visual appearance.

FIGURE 5.16
Jamie's Project



The projects we've described in this chapter are alternatives to the traditional multigenre writing project and might be a way to experiment with multigenre writing as an extension of curricular items. Multigenre writing could be utilized in the science content areas as well, expanding on or replacing the science report. However teachers and students enter into multigenre writing, a deep understanding of the topic is the foundation and the multiple genres allow students to obtain a layered understanding. In the last section we offer yet one more way to express understanding through multiple genres.

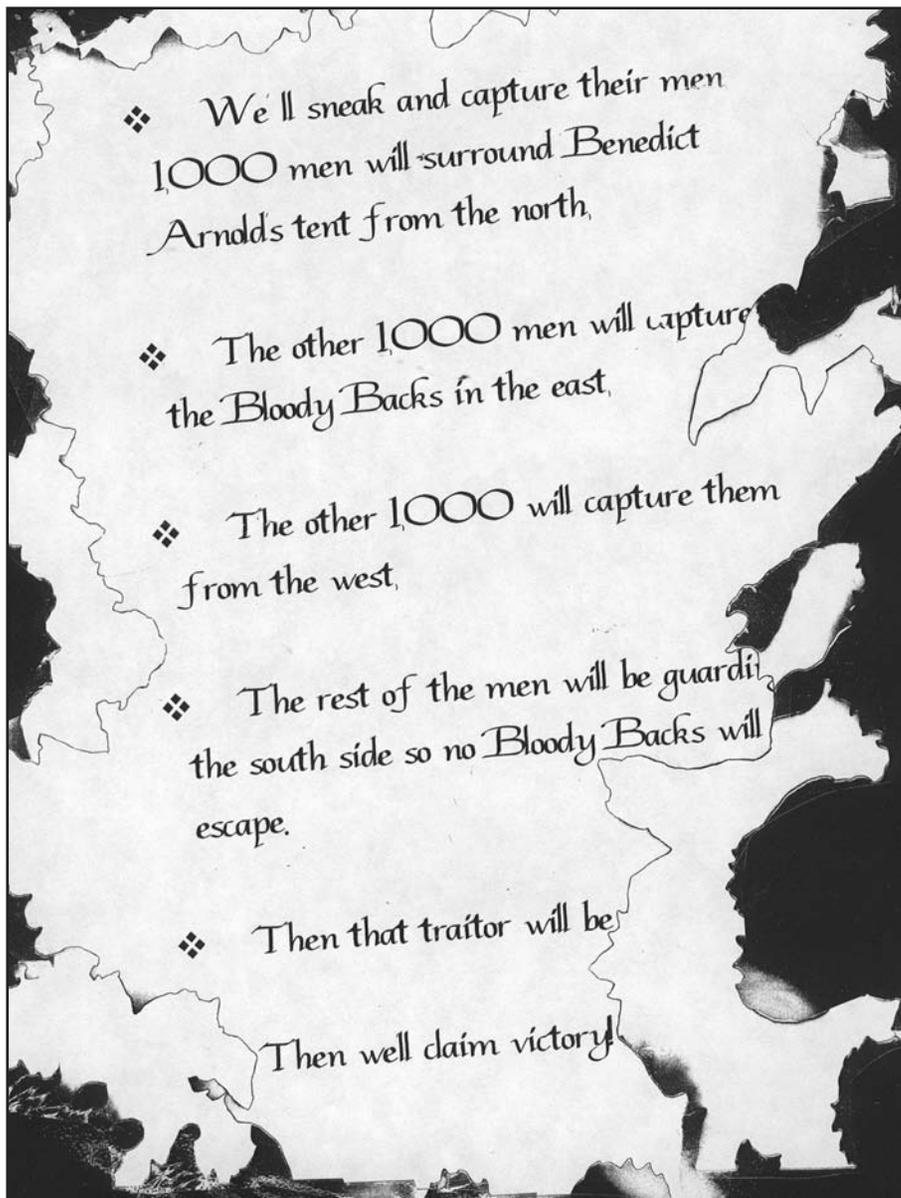


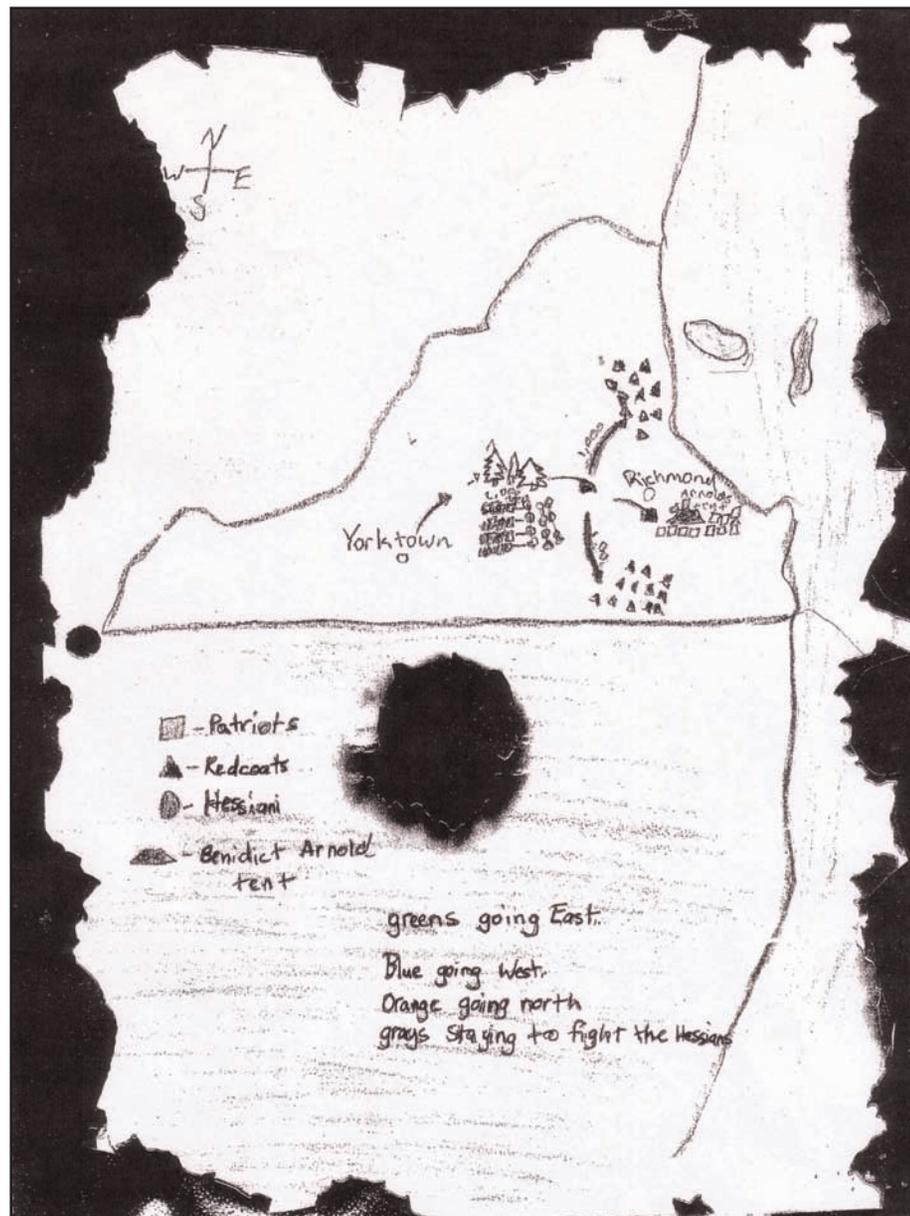
FIGURE 5.16
(continued)

Multigenre Writing as a Response to Literature

Our last alternative for multigenre writing is as a response to literature. When children use multigenre writing as a response to literature, they are entering into the story world of the characters and interpreting what characters would say in response to a particular situation, what they might say to another character, or what an outside voice or character not in the book would write or say about them.

This type of response is certainly not a replacement for quality discussions or other types of response, but it requires children to have a deep understanding of the literature because interpretation is necessary as they create writing pieces from a variety of perspectives. In this section we describe how children of various ages used particular reading strategies to understand a book in depth before beginning their

FIGURE 5.16
(continued)

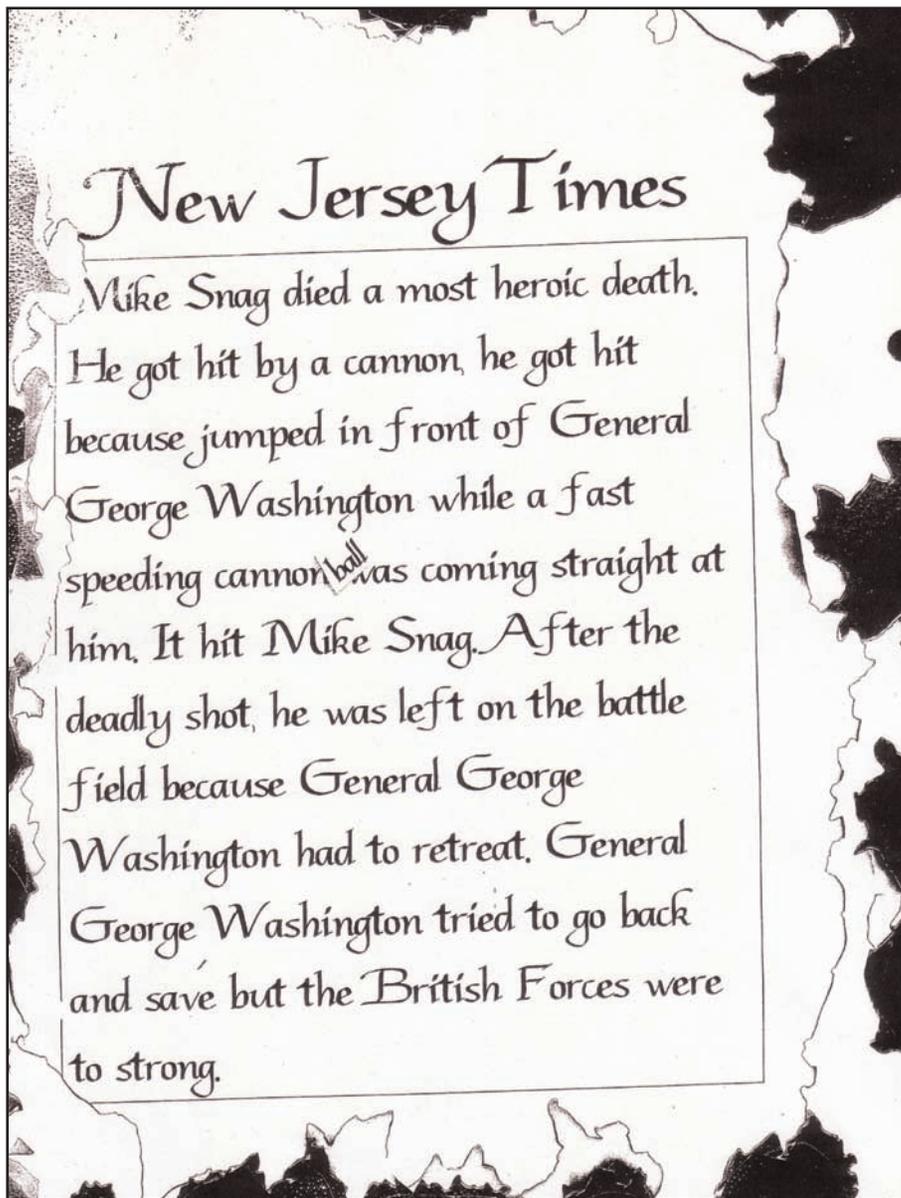


multigenre writing project and then how students engaged in multigenre writing as a response to literature.

Voices in the Park

For this particular unit of study Suzette read *Voices in the Park* (Browne 2001) in a series of read-alouds and discussion activities to a multiage class of first, second, and third graders. This was a week-and-a-half unit of study on this particular book. Students had read other Anthony Browne books and as a class wanted to further investigate this book. *Voices in the Park* is a complex picture book that tells about an outing of four people, a mother and her son and a father and his daughter. The book is told in separate voices and in first person as each character tells about his or her simultaneous experience in the park one day. This is a story of friendship, class, and point of view as Browne allows the

FIGURE 5.16
(continued)

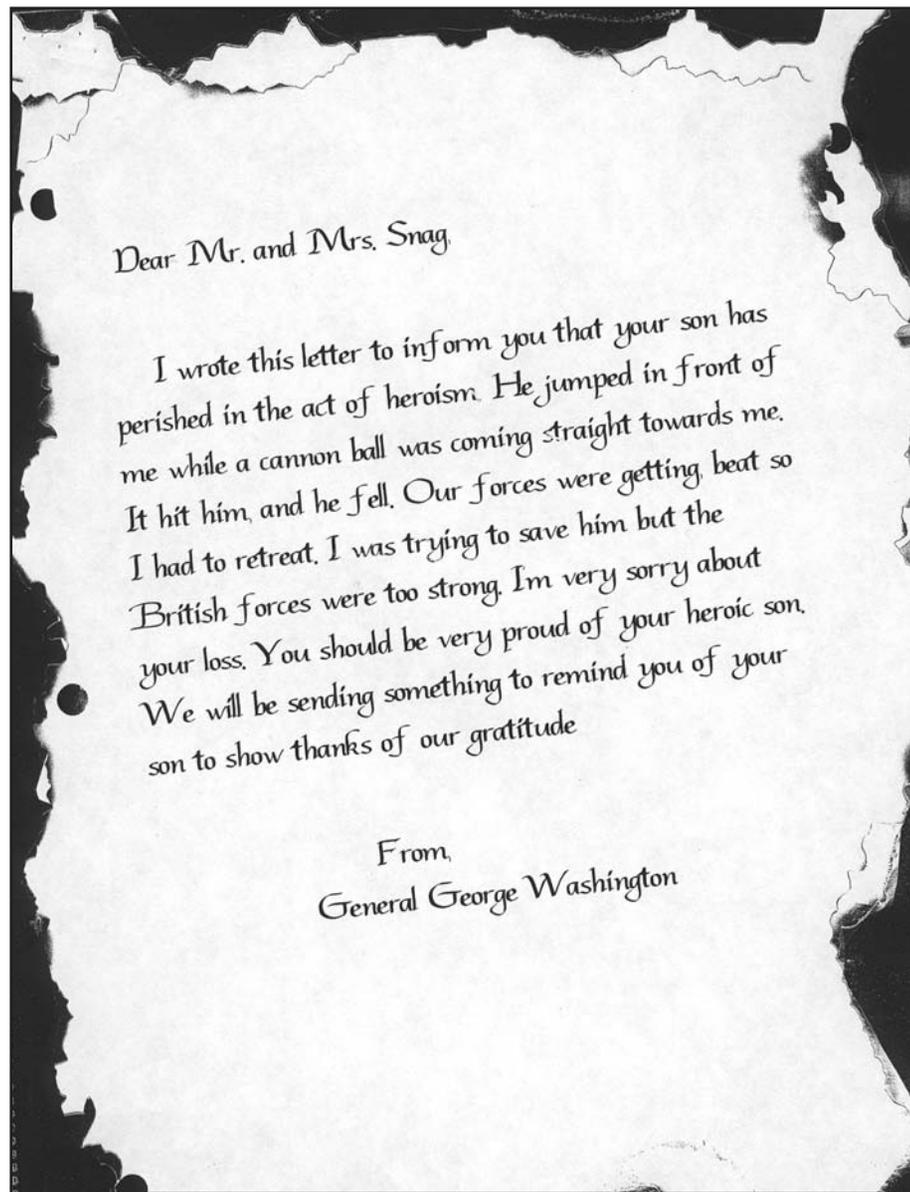


reader to enter into the characters' world and understand life from each perspective. The text of this book is simple but the story is extended through the illustrations, which require time for readers to notice and interpret the visual elements.

In order for children to engage in multigenre writing as a response, they first need a deep understanding of the text, for they cannot articulate their interpretations if they do not understand it. *Voices in the Park* is complex as the voices are separate and tell the story that occurred at the exact same moment, so children need time to ponder and to understand the interplay between text and illustrations.

Suzette began this unit with a read-aloud of *Voices in the Park*. After the read-aloud she and the students completed an impressions, connections, and wonderings chart. Students shared their ideas and initial thoughts about the picture book. Following is an example of the students' responses to the book.

FIGURE 5.16
(continued)



Impressions

- ❖ Charles is sad.
- ❖ The trees represent that he wants to climb the tree but his mother is going to get mad.
- ❖ The lampposts are shaped like the mom's hat and there are white clouds in them.
- ❖ On Charles' side of the park the trees are dead and on Smudge's side it is all light because Charles is amazed and Smudge is happy.

Connections

- ❖ He uses the color red to show power like in his other books, especially *Gorilla* (Browne 1983) and *Willy the Wimp* (Browne 1995).

- ❖ The parents are sad and busy like in *Gorilla*.
- ❖ There is a problem with Charles like the mom in *The Piggybook* (1986).

Wonderings

- ❖ Why did the mom take Charles to the park if he can't play?
- ❖ What does the fruit represent in Smudge's story?
- ❖ Why is the text so simple?
- ❖ Why is the mom so mean and why does she think the dad is a "frightful type"?

The second day Suzette read the book again and brought in multiple copies of *Voices in the Park* for children to follow along with and to reread after the read-aloud. After the second read-aloud the class added to their impressions, connections, and wonderings chart.

Suzette then completed a disruption-of-text activity (Serafini 2006). In this activity the illustrations and the text are separated and children spend time attending to each in isolation; then they come back together and discuss the impact the parts have on the whole. First Suzette divided the class into four groups, and two looked at the illustrations and two looked at the text. Suzette made two complete color copies of the illustrations without the text and displayed the illustrations on two separate walls in a storyboard fashion. For thirty minutes students in two small groups studied and discussed what they noticed and what meaning they could apply to only the illustrations. They recorded their ideas on a worksheet that was divided into four sections: first ideas, text only, illustrations only, and new interpretations about the book. On this form students recorded their ideas about the book from the first two read-alouds and then recorded ideas during their small-group investigations.

The other two groups received a typed copy of the text from *Voices in the Park* and did a readers' theatre reading of the text. After the reading they discussed and recorded the interpretations they had by attending to the text only. Because the illustrations are so compelling in this book, students needed time to attend to the text and how the words and structure enhance and at times contradict the story told through the illustrations. The next day the students switched groups and completed the process again. On the last day each group received a copy of the book; they read it again and shared new insights they had based on the disruption-of-text activity.

This in-depth study of a picture book is necessary to help children understand the characters, setting, themes, and symbols throughout the book. In these small discussion groups, students listen to their classmates and expand their understanding as new possibilities for meaning are presented. This activity allows children to understand the book at a deeper level as they investigate the interplay between text and illustrations.

Once the discussion and investigation of *Voices in the Park* was completed, the class then brainstormed genres that would be appropriate for the characters in the book. Suzette and the children discussed what kind of writing these characters might

do and what someone else might write about or to them. The following is a list of possible genres and topics the students shared:

- ❖ job application for the dad
- ❖ birthday invitation from Smudge to Charles
- ❖ journal entries from Charles, or any character
- ❖ to-do list for the maids while Mother and Charles are at the park
- ❖ letters or journal entries from the dogs' point of view
- ❖ letters to the characters from Anthony Browne
- ❖ map of the park
- ❖ relaxation flyer for Mother to visit a spa
- ❖ job wanted flyer
- ❖ labels for Charles' playthings
- ❖ drawing of Smudge's room
- ❖ thank-you letter for the flower from Smudge
- ❖ journal entry from sad and happy Santa Claus

The brainstorming session was as powerful as the actual writing as students shared ideas on character development and character motivation. As they decided on a genre, they explained why the character might write something like that, and their choice of audience demonstrated their understanding of the interconnectedness of each character.

During the writing time, Suzette spent her time conferencing with students and discussing their reasoning for their genre choices. She asked:

- ❖ Who is writing the piece?
- ❖ Who is the audience?
- ❖ Why would he or she write it?

At this level it was important for the children to articulate verbally rather than have them struggle through writing a defense. In this manner children were able to focus on the content of their piece. Each child was able to answer these questions and understood why the piece was appropriate for the character. Figure 5.17 provides an example of third grader Mathew's letter to a paint company written from the father's point of view, asking for a job, and a response from the paint company. In this example, Mathew understood the plight of the father and his desperation as a single father to take care of his daughter.

Through the multigenre writing project, students explored the feelings of each character and were required to interpret the character's personality as well as intentions through their choice of genre. At the end of the project students shared their writing pieces with the class and explained their choice of genre and why the character might have written it. The following are some of the ideas they shared about their genre choices:

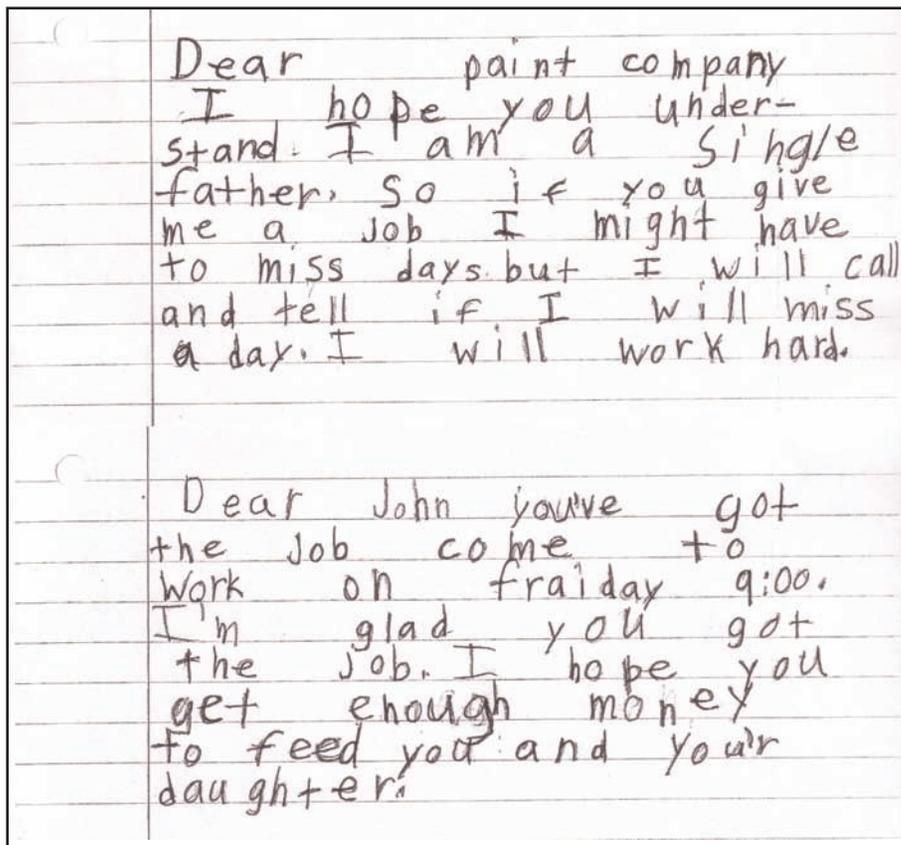


FIGURE 5.17
Matthew's Letter and Response

- ❖ The father would have written a letter to a paint company asking for a job. He probably would have just gone there but the letter shows what he might have said. I think he would do whatever it takes to get a job. He had hope.
- ❖ I think that the dogs were very friendly and did not think the same way as their owners; they did not care about money or clothes or what kind of dog they were, they just played. So I think that if they could they would have written a letter to each other saying thanks for a fun time in the park.
- ❖ Smudge was happy, Charlie gave her a flower so she would say thanks and I think she would draw a picture for him.

As students shared their projects they expressed even more understanding than what their actual genre could show. Through this sharing students had new interpretations about the book as they thought about what each character might say and how they were each related to each other. They also discussed their personal reactions to the story and shared their thoughts on why Anthony Browne wrote the story.

Multigenre writing provides a different avenue to discuss literature as children share and negotiate their own interpretations about the text, but they also use genre as an avenue for discussion as they interpret the kinds of writing or speaking the character might do outside of the story. In order for this discussion and writing project to be effective, students must have an in-depth understanding of the text, themes, and tone of the story.

Unit on Building Community

In this last example, the multigenre writing was in response to a selection of books all pertaining to the theme of building community. For this unit we draw from Ali and Lisa's sixth-grade classroom. Ali and Lisa conducted a unit of study described in Serafini and Serafini Young's book *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days* (2006).

To begin the school year Ali and Lisa read many picture books (see Appendix C for a list of these books) that all have a similar theme of accepting differences and living together differently. The first book they read was *The Straight Line Wonder* (Fox 1997). In this story a straight line no longer wishes to remain straight; he wants to jump in humps and twirl in whirls. His friends tell him to stay straight or people will stare. At the end of the book a movie director discovers the straight line and makes him a star and the other lines accept him for who he is.

After reading the book aloud students engaged in a discussion about it and also how the ideas presented in the book might apply to their classroom community. Ali and Lisa completed an ICW chart. Following are some student responses to *The Straight Line Wonder*.

Impressions

- ❖ The straight sine is a strong character.
- ❖ I think the straight line is not like a real kid; it is too tough to be exactly who you want to be—people laugh when you try.

Connections

- ❖ This book reminds me of Molly Lou Melon and how she was not afraid to be herself.
- ❖ In Horace and Morris, the struggle to be the kind of girl and boy they want to be but in the end they compromise; the straight line did not give in to his friends—they all changed instead.
- ❖ This reminds me of when I was teased for being short.
- ❖ It reminds me of how I go along with everything my friends want to do.

Wonderings

- ❖ Why did the friends only like him when he became famous?
- ❖ How did the straight line become so strong?
- ❖ Was Mem Fox strong like him?
- ❖ Did she know someone like that?
- ❖ What would happen if we twirled in whirls?

Each day Ali and Lisa read a different book that built on the discussions they'd had about community the previous day. During the writing workshop time, Ali and Lisa began a discussion about genre and created a list of the genres they were familiar with. As they were creating this list, they also discussed ways to respond to literature. They introduced the literature response log that students would be required to respond in, but they also introduced multigenre writing as a response to literature.

They discussed that as the students became familiar with characters and themes of books, they could choose a variety of genres and perspectives to write from.

At the end of the week Ali and Lisa asked students to choose a book and then to choose a multigenre writing project they would like to complete in response to that particular book. They gave students the following guidelines:

- ❖ Choose a text.
- ❖ Determine the important things you got from the text.
- ❖ Determine what genre would be the most appropriate for your response or, rather, which one fits best.
- ❖ Write your response and remember to show understanding.

Before students began their own projects, Ali and Lisa modeled one for them. They chose *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell 2001). In this book a very small girl with a squeaky voice and buckteeth lives with her grandmother, who teaches her to stand tall and to be proud of herself. When Molly Lou Melon moves to a new school, she encounters a bully who puts her grandmother's lessons to the test. In the end standing tall wins out and wins the respect of the school bully. Here is the letter the teachers typed in front of their students and projected for all to see.

Dear Molly Lou Melon,

I think you are an extremely unique, strong and brave person. I really like the way you are different and not afraid to be yourself. I really admire the positive way you handled the situation with that bully, Ronald.

I'm reading another book about a girl named Stargirl, who reminds me of you in the way that she's not afraid to be different. Like you, Stargirl is unique and proud of her talents. Thank you for inspiring me to be strong and unique.

Sincerely,
Miss Gamble

As a class they discussed their choice of book and choice of genre. Ali and Lisa shared how the letter genre would be a great choice to share personal feelings about Molly Lou Melon and to share directly with the character the connections to other literature they were making in reference to her story. Other genre possibilities were letters to Ronald, a no-bullying poster, letters to Grandma, journal entries, a list of sayings from Grandma to remember, and a book on how to be yourself and to stand up to bullies.

Ali and Lisa then invited students to create their own multigenre writing projects. Many students completed numerous responses to a variety of characters and books. Figures 5.18 and 5.19 present two student examples. These examples demonstrate students' ability to connect with characters and to understand the overall themes of the unit as well as to interpret characters' feelings and how other characters might relate to them. In order for students to engage in this kind of response they must have a deep understanding of the story, characters, and author's intentions and have a deep personal connection with the story and the message.

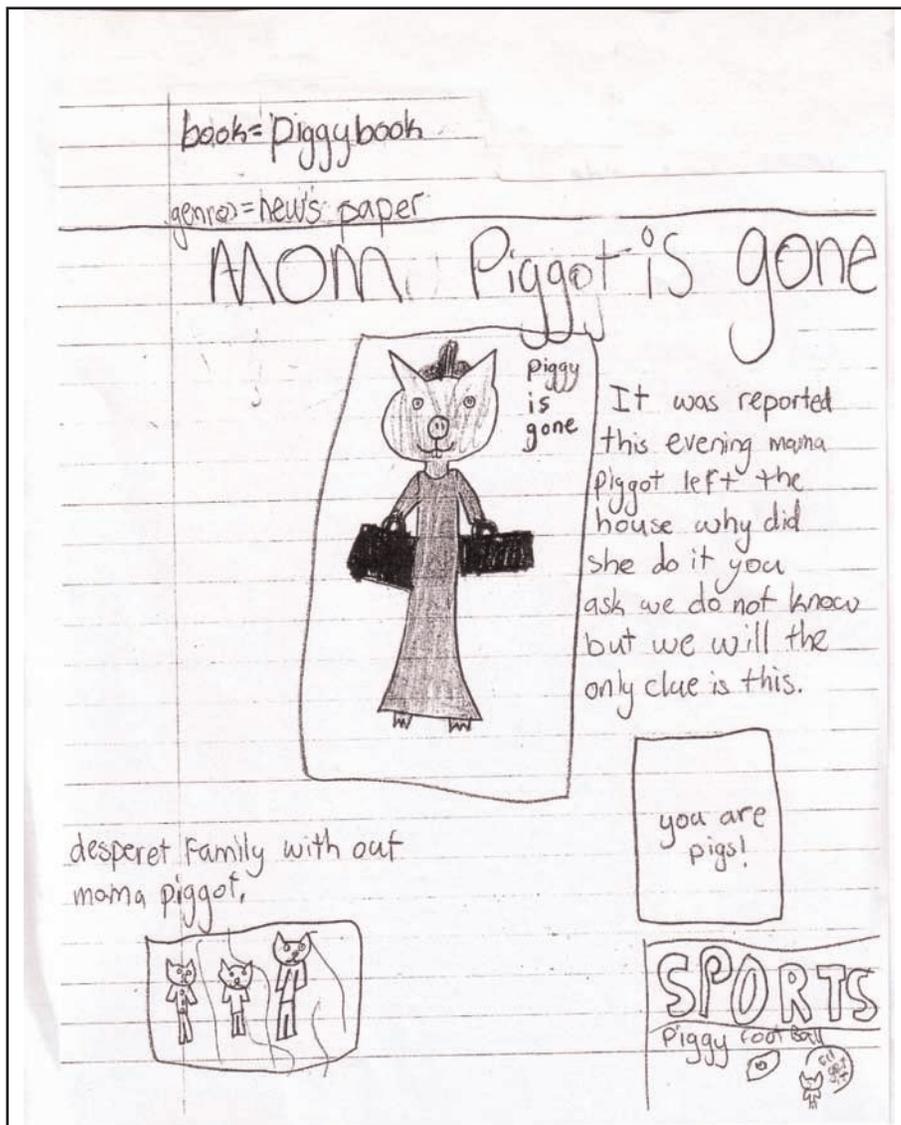
Multigenre writing is a powerful and exciting avenue for children to choose as they experiment with audiences and perspectives and discover multiple purposes

FIGURE 5.18
Response to Straight Line Wonder



while choosing a variety of genres to express their expanding understanding of topic and genre. Multigenre writing can be used as a unit all by itself, as an exploration and representation of research, or as an extension of a unit of study that already exists in the curriculum. Through this kind of writing, students make many more decisions about their writing and have many more choices to enter into writing in comparison to prompt writing, which affords students little choice or voice. This chapter outlines a variety of ways to enter into this kind of writing and it is only a small example of the ways multigenre writing can be used for explorations and expression.

FIGURE 5.19
Response to The Piggybook



It is important to note that not all of these multigenre writing projects occur within one academic year. Suzette conducted the balloon speeches each year while teaching in Colorado and used multigenre as an extension. In separate years and classrooms the Revolutionary War unit was conducted as well as the responses to literature. It is important to look at the existing curriculum and find places where multigenre writing will benefit children and their understanding of topic and genre.

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