Ellen Kendrick

Dr. Mueller

Doc Gallery item

2 December 2014

At the beginning of the genre unit, I had students submit proposals for the genres with which they wished to work. I did this so that the students could choose the genres that interested them the most rather than choosing from a list and so I could help give each student a direction for his or her project. The proposal was the first assignment due in the unit and was assigned after the students read “Navigating Genre” by Kerry Dirk and discussed genre examples together in class. Students were also given time to create lists of genres that interest them. I started using listing as a prewriting tool along with freewriting about list items after reading Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*. Goldberg’s book focuses mainly on creative writing, but her process suggestions can be adapted nicely for any type of writing at any level. I used several different prewriting strategies in this unit as suggested by Elizabeth Blackburn-Brockman, who encourages English teachers to show students the importance of prewriting. I think prewriting is especially important when dealing with topics that may be difficult for students to grasp. The proposals, as a more formal step in the prewriting process, allowed me to quickly give direct feedback on each project before students began work on their drafts, and it allowed the students to make a plan for their projects. The following is the proposal assignment prompt given to the students.

**Proposal**

**Due October 13, 2014**

The purpose of the proposal is to think through your genre essay beyond just picking a topic. In the proposal you should:

* identify the genre you would like to work with
* discuss an attached example of your chosen genre
* explain why you would like to work with this genre
* anticipate what you might discover in studying this genre

Your proposal should be one page (not including the attached genre example), double spaced, and in Times New Roman 12 point font.

Before turning their proposals in, the students were asked to share them with one or two other students. The students then gave feedback on the proposals and helped one another come up with ideas for the projects. After reading the proposals myself, I noticed that almost every student needed to narrow down his or her proposed topic by choosing a subgenre. Many students had chosen to work with broad topics such as music, film, or romance. To resolve this issue, we chose two genres together in class and listed several possible subgenres and areas of focus for each. For one of these areas of focus, we listed as many characteristics as we could and discussed how one might get started on an essay over that topic. I then gave the class time to write in response to the following prompt.

**In class writing, October 15**

Narrow down the genre you chose to focus on for this assignment, and answer the following questions about your genre as thoroughly as you can at this point.

1. What is the genre? Where can it be found? Who uses it and for what?

2. What are the standard conventions of the genre? Why are those the standard conventions? How do those conventions help the genre meet its goals / fulfill its purpose?

3. What are the genre’s greatest strengths / weaknesses?

Once this writing was complete, students had a better understanding of what was expected of them for the project and they had a clear direction and starting point. This formative piece was also quite helpful to me as it allowed me to see which students were still struggling with understanding what the assignment was asking of them. For example, I had several students who didn’t quite understand what I meant by “conventions,” so I made a point to work with those students right away so they didn’t get a late start on their drafts. If I were to teach this unit again, I would anticipate the need for more focused topics and I would have the class narrow down broad topics together before assigning the proposals to hopefully save a little time. Though, I believe this assignment did save some time in the long run as they were able to anticipate potential issues with their projects right away.

Works Cited

Blackburn-Brockman, Elizabeth. "Prewriting, Planning, and Professional Communication." *The*

*English Journal* 91.2 (2001): 51-53.

Dirk, Kerry. "Navigating Genres." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*. West Lafayette, IN:

Parlor, 2010.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing down the Bones: Freeing the Writer within*. Boston: Shambhala,

2005. Print.