

## Balanced Literacy- “Lovin’ It”

By  
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The students in English 11 worked with a partner to read aloud “The Declaration of Independence.” As they read, they worked as partners to compose one declaration of independence from their parents. A writing goal for grade 11 for the SOLs is 11.7, which states “The student will write in a variety of forms with an emphasis on persuasion.” By using “The Declaration of Independence” as a model the students were able to recognize, analyze, and use a variety of techniques relevant to persuasive writing. First, Jefferson and the students set down in writing a purpose for their writing. Second, the students were able to identify and use parallelism in their own writing, thus using similar grammatical forms and sentence patterns to express ideas of equal importance. The students could find examples of parallelism in the grievances against the king such as, “He has refused...He has forbidden...” They could understand that this technique emphasizes the king’s crimes and that the statements are of equal worth as evidence of his tyranny. They could also understand that the use of repetition at the beginning of each statement of grievance added emphasis to the statement. By Jefferson’s repeated use of the words *tyrant* and *tyranny*, the students understood that Jefferson wanted to make clear that the king had actually caused the rebellion with his cruel and oppressive acts. By following the pattern of this impressive document, the students could understand the purpose of the document and the techniques used for emphasis and persuasion as they prepared their own declarations.

Following the above activity these same English 11 students did shared reading/think aloud in pairs or small groups to look for aphorisms in the selection “fromWalden”. Following their reading, they wrote a letter to their parents as if each were Thoreau. In it they had to pretend that they had been living at Walden Pond for one month and did not want to “come back to town, get a real job, and settle down” as the parents had requested. Each student had to look back to the text to find the reasons given for staying. They were expounding on Thoreau’s experience as if it were their own and were elaborating their “ideas clearly and accurately” (SOL 11.7). This might be too much of a stretch, but I like to think students are doing shared writing with Thoreau himself, rather than with the teacher or other students.

Later in the semester the students were working with the free verse writings of Walt Whitman. Many of his poems contain vivid images of America in the mid-1880s. We discussed the images that we thought captured the spirit and reality of America today. When they finished reading aloud (1) to hear the rhythm of the rhymes, (2) to observe the use of the devices of catalog, repetition, and (3) to observe the use of parallelism, the students worked in pairs to create poems using these devices to create vivid images of America today. With this, writing students addressed SOL 11.7 (Develop a focus for writing).

While working with writing aloud during those weeks, I observed that as the students talked together about what they were writing and worked in pairs to collaborate on specific assignments, they were coming to insightful conclusions about the statements that the authors and poets made. They could relate these insights to their own situations and that of their native land.