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Curiosity Created the Caption

Overview and Rationale

“Every photo needs a well-written caption. This lesson taps into students’ natural curiosity as they generate questions about photos, interview, and gather information for writing captions to answer their questions.”

Goals for Understanding

- Essential Questions
 - What is the purpose of a caption?
 - What information do we include in a caption?
- Critical Engagement Questions
 - How do captions help tell the story of a photo?
 - What questions does a caption need to answer?
 - Nebraska Language Arts Standard 12.1.6.j Generate and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating prior knowledge, information from the text and additional sources, to support answers
 - Nebraska Language Arts Standard 12.3.3 Reciprocal Communication: Students will develop, apply, and adapt reciprocal communication skills.
 - Nebraska Language Arts Standard 12.2.1 Writing Process: Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other standard conventions appropriate for grade level.

Resources/Materials Access to Internet, paper, writing utensils, digital cameras

Overviews and Timeline

Activity 1 (One 50-minute class)

- (This lesson should come after basic photography instruction and practice.)
- Divide students into groups of three and give each group a different compelling photo from Reuters or AP Best Photos of the Year (without caption or story information).
- Have group members generate at least five questions they have about the photo and what is happening in the photo. Discuss commonalities in their questions (they will pick up that most of the questions are the 5W’s and H).

- Give groups the information associated with their photo (do not give them the actual caption). Have them identify the 5W's and H.
- Before formal caption writing instruction, have groups write one or two sentences about their assigned photo using the information they were given, with a focus on the information they identified. Do not give them any more guidelines or requirements. Once complete, discuss the challenges of the task. What difficulties did they have? What did they still need or want to know? How could they get that information?

Activity 2 (Two 50-minute classes)

- Day 1: Again, divide students into groups of three and give each group a digital camera (or have them use their own camera or phone). Have each group go out into the school and take 9 or more photos of what they find (preferably compelling, newsworthy) in 30 minutes. Each group member should take at least three photos and all group members should know the context of every photo from their group (the 5W's and H).
- Have each group select their favorite photo (make sure each group's photo is of a different subject than the other groups).
- Give each group a photo from another group and have the group members generate at least 10 questions about the photo they are given (ensure their questions include the 5W's and H).
- Group members should then take the questions they generated earlier, and interview the group members who took the photo to gather all essential information.
- Day 2: Give basic caption writing instruction that includes information and examples pertaining to lead-ins, first sentence in present tense, second sentence in past tense and one quote. Discuss not stating the obvious; discuss giving information the reader could get from looking at the photo. Discuss active voice and different ways to begin a caption. Discuss style and attribution (naming conventions, etc.).
- Groups should then look at the information they gathered through interviewing and assemble a caption for their photo that follows the guidelines. Each group member should write one part of the caption: one person writes the first sentence, another person writes the second sentence and a third person writes the third sentence (the quote). Together they can come up with the lead-in.
- Using the caption grading checklist (see handout), group members should critique each other's work to ensure they are following the guidelines. They may re-interview to gather additional information as needed.
- Once all of the captions are written, put each photo without the caption and then with the caption into a slideshow and review as a class through discussion. How does the caption help tell the story of the photo? What challenges did they experience while working on the captions? What information is essential to have for a well-written caption? Why is the first sentence in present tense? Why is the second sentence in past tense? What impact does a quote have on the story told by the photo and caption?

Assessment

Captions are assessed graded using the caption grading checklist (see handout). Students should be given the opportunity to revise for a final grade.

References Recommended

"Hot Tips for Writing Photo Captions," Poynter.org, Kenneth Irby,
<http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/1753/hot-tips-for-writing-photo-captions/>.

" 10 Tips for Better Cutlines: Improve Your Captions Today," newscollege.ca, Greg McLachlan,
<http://www.newscollege.ca/p69.htm>

Attach student handouts to lesson plan, if applicable.