

Materials

1. Ink pad
2. Draft paper (I used inexpensive “Marker Paper” found in the children’s art supplies at Target, Dillons, & Walmart)
3. Writing prompts listed at the end of this article
4. Digital camera (I have used my iPad and personal camera phone)

Time Frame

One week, depending on actual time in the classroom. I base this on a 55-minute daily class meeting schedule.

Introduction

I use a Google Slide presentation to share with students examples of fingerprint essays. I then introduce basic information about fingerprints: *Fingerprints are the tiny ridges, whorls, and valley patterns on the tip of each finger. They form from pressure on a baby's tiny, developing fingers in the womb. The skin on the palmar surface of the hands and feet forms ridges, so-called papillary ridges, in patterns that are unique to each individual and which do not change over time. Even identical twins (who share their DNA) do not have identical fingerprints.* My students often become fascinated by their own prints and we discuss how the prints they are born with are the ones they will die with. We watch a short video entitled “Why are Your Fingerprints Unique?” available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCRy8voU5dE>.



Fingerprints

This is a multistep project where it makes sense that some students are writing while others are taking their own fingerprints. But for ease in understanding, I’ll start with prints.

1. Using an inexpensive black stamp ink pad, I demonstrate for students. First, ink the thumb. Then press the inked thumb onto paper three times without re-inking. I find this 3-sample method gives me options as some prints will be more clear and distinct than others, and I don’t want to re-take fingerprints. I provide Clorox wipes to help students clean their fingers. (I also offer a generic template to students who may be uncomfortable with taking a fingerprint, but it is rare that a student opts out. I had one opt out in the 43 we did this year—and I have students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.)

2. Digitize the fingerprint. To be a useful template, the fingerprint needs to be enlarged to better fill a standard 8.5x11 sheet of paper. I’ve used both my camera phone and an iPad to take pictures with equal results. Once I have the photo, I select the best print and crop accordingly. I also typically adjust contrast to better

enhance the lines. I’ll do a batch of 5-10 students at a time, carefully labelling each print with the student’s name because despite their unique differences, students can’t identify their own prints, especially once they’re enlarged.

3. Share Templates with students. The essay portion is actually done on a second sheet of paper placed on top of the fingerprint. Some students will not need to do anything special to see the guidelines of their own fingerprints, but some need to take additional steps. I recommend using a black marker to thicken and darken lines. Some of my students held their templates and essay sheets up to a window, using the light to trace guidelines onto their “art sheet.”

What do they write about? The Prompts

I give students five prompts, which are available at the end of this article. I share those prompts as QuickWrites, encouraging students to just go with their first impulses and write. I set a 5-minute timer and encourage them to write for the entire time. I also impress upon them that these prompts are just guides; they are free to change the prompt parameters to fit. I also emphasize they get to go back and change things and fix it for the fingerprint essay. Sometimes I have students turn and share what they’ve written with a friend, but I stress this isn’t peer review. While some students are writing, I may be working with a small group to take fingerprints.

Work Time

Eventually, students should have five working responses and a large version of their fingerprint. I encourage a minimum of 5-6 sentences per response because once students begin creating their final work, it’s always easier to decide to leave something out than to write more fresh material to fill gaps. In some ways, this is the most organic revision of any project I use. Students have to consider both how their words will *look* and what their words are *saying*.

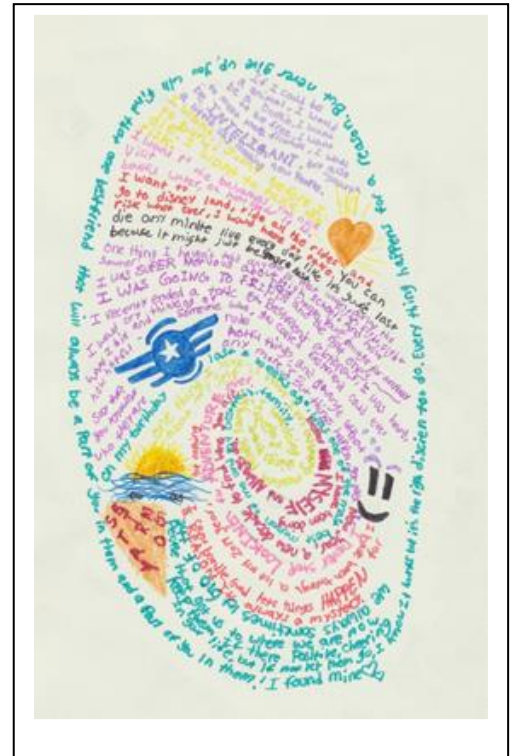
I think it’s important that students get regular feedback as they’re creating because students can arrive at the same product in different ways. Some students would simply string their prompt responses together from their QuickWrites. Others were more mindful about *where* things appeared based on the other graphics or pictures that they were incorporating into the results. Most didn’t create a rough draft per se, but wherever possible, I did provide feedback on the QuickWrites, especially if I felt the response was too short to be adequate to fill the space of the fingerprint.

How is this project graded/assessed?

To evaluate the demonstrable writing skills, I use the rough drafts. Because students get to exercise so much creativity in the appearance of the final work, following sentences can be a challenge. I do a skills-based assessment on what they’re revising and consider both conventions and sentence structure more loosely than in a formal essay. As beautiful as the sample on the next page is (yes, she’s an artist), I couldn’t read her writing on the art piece. But her rough draft was legible.

Intangible Teacher Gains

The inherent benefits begin with low-stakes writing for students. Most don’t even realize they’ve generated enough material for a standard 5-paragraph essay. The prompts provide

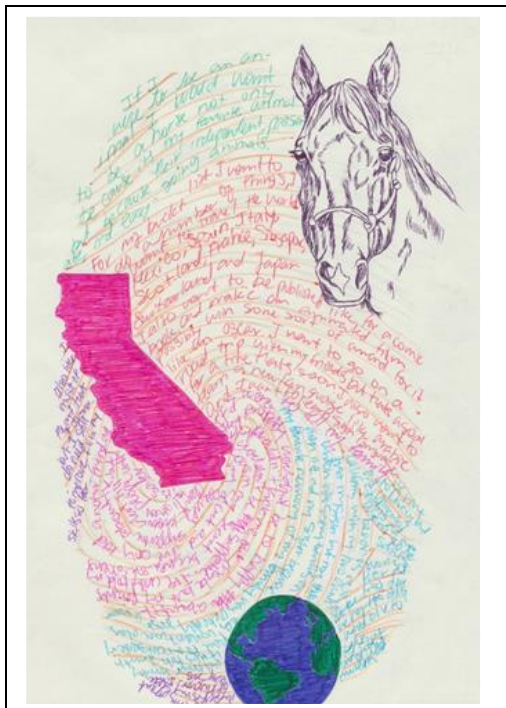


organizational structure, and the format encourages creative expression. Some students have written poems, while others have done bullet-style lists for their goals. Several of the samples provided here are from my Tier 2 ninth-grade literacy students—typically reluctant readers and writers. The other samples are from my 11th grade college-prep students.

It's important to note that I didn't start the year with this project. I had established trust and norms with students that made them more likely to trust me and the process. I also informed them that their work would only be on display with their permission. Every single student ultimately shared their final project in a Gallery Walk, but just knowing that they didn't have to share empowered them to write. And all of the prompts are adaptable. Most students responded to the prompts as they appeared, but the truly powerful writing came from a need to share something of themselves.

Prompts

1. Choose which animal you are MOST like. Consider WHY you are most like that creature--what are characteristics that you share. Here are some things to think about: group or solitary, terrain, predator/prey, intelligent/sly, fierce/shy.
2. What do you dream about? What is something that you want for yourself (not material things)? When you are 40, what is something you hope you have done? Do you have a bucket list?
3. What's something that NOBODY knows about you? Would people be surprised to know this about you? Is it something you need to keep secret or is it just something that's unusual? Is it hard to keep it secret? For this Prompt--you do NOT have to actually write the secret itself. You can write about how people might respond if they knew this about you.
4. What's your very favorite memory of your family? You can write about one person or about a special time (like a birthday or holiday), but it should be something that makes you SMILE when you think about it!
5. What is something that you LOVE about yourself?



Kansas State Standards for Writing (Grades 9-10)

W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

W.9-10.12 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Author Biography

Mother, wife, teacher, poet. April Pameticky shares time between her high school English classroom and the creative community of artists and writers in Kansas. She launched the *Wichita Broadside Project* and currently serves as editor of *River City Poetry*, an online poetry journal. Her own work can be seen in journals like *Malpais Review*, *KONZA*, and *Chiron Review*. She is also the author of several chapbooks, and her debut full-length collection *Waterbound* (2019) is available from Spartan Press. Follow April @aprilinwichita. Learn more about her at <http://aprilpameticky.com>. Email her at aprilpameticky@hotmail.com.