
TEACHING TIPS

Delight and Inspire

Beth Gulley, Column Editor
Johnson County Community College

When we put out the call for teaching tips this year, we did not have a theme in mind. However, as the submissions rolled in, one emerged. The selections in this column highlight the ways we as teachers listen to our students. This deep listening enables us to intervene in students' learning experiences in order to create a lasting positive impact on our students' lives.

Listening helps us recognize when what we are doing stops working, and we make changes. This is what Curtis Becker describes in his teaching tip about a new way to give feedback to middle school writers. We hear what our students are saying by what they are not saying aloud. Jeremy Gulley reminds us of this in his teaching tip about what students will volunteer when they trust us. We create opportunities for students to hear from each other and from historical figures as Marianne Kunkel and Carolyn Nelson demonstrate in their assignments.

In addition to listening to our students, these selections remind us that the classroom can be a place of joy. While reading the teaching tip selections, I was reminded of the preface of *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks. The revolutionary idea that has stayed with me all these years since I first read it is that learning should be empowering, and learning should be fun. As hooks describes her own schooling, "Attending school then was sheer joy. I loved being a student. I loved learning. School was the place of ecstasy—pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure" (1994, p. 3).

So often outside forces steal the joy from educational spaces, so it is great to be reminded that learning can delight and inspire.

Reference

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Author Biography

Beth Gulley is a Professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, where she teaches developmental writing, composition, and literature. She holds an MA in English Literature from the University of Missouri at Kansas City, and she earned a PhD in Curriculum Theory from the University of Kansas in 2009. She is on the board of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English.

Teaching Tip: Give Effective Feedback to Young Writers

Curtis Becker

Holton Middle School

As a new teacher, I struggled to find a method of evaluating writing without spending “months” grading 80 essays and providing meaningful feedback at the same time. As I was student teaching, my mentor gave me a list of canned phrases to write on papers. When she retired, I was also gifted a collection of rubrics for any occasion. Unfortunately, students only looked at rubrics and feedback as grade justification. If they were happy with the grade, most didn’t even look at the paper.

I went to grad school several years into my teaching career. During my English MA program, I explored many topics including effective feedback. My research and writing at the time, combined with my observations of actual students, led me to one conclusion: I would need to persuade them to value feedback. Since students did not see it as a means to improve—they had no motivation to do so—I had to flip the tables on them. They wanted to move through the project as quickly as possible, so I embedded the feedback and used it as a gatekeeper for the next step.

I ditched the overly-detailed rubrics and after-the-fact feedback, and introduced feedback while the project was progressing. Students are now given a step-by-step checklist. Each step culminates with a mini-conference that I sign off on when complete. During the conference, I give feedback and expect it to be implemented before I sign off on the step. The last conference is over a completed first draft; all feedback must be addressed and reflected in the final draft. This approach is also great for students with special needs: I modify and accommodate as I give feedback.

Now, when I grade, I check for my initials on each step. I compare the first draft to the final draft, and if all is correct, I record an “A.” During the project, while I was modeling a procedural writing process that includes the implementation of feedback, I was grading. I can now get through a stack of essays in a couple of hours. Students receive points for completing each step, so they tend to buy-in to the whole process. When we start a paper/project, I tell them that regardless of their previous essay writing, they can easily achieve an “A”; they just have to follow the directions.

Author Biography

Curtis Becker is an author and educator, currently teaching at Holton Middle School in Holton, KS. During almost twenty years in the classroom, Becker has taught at the middle school, high school, and college/university levels. He lives in Topeka and is a part of the local writing community and a frequenter of many open mics and coffee shops in the area. His book, *He Watched and Took Note*, a collection of poetry and flash fiction, can be found at/ordered by major booksellers and local bookstores.

Teaching Tip: Inspire Empathy Using a Hands-On Lesson About the Japanese Internment

Carolyn Nelson

Wheatland High School

I used this lesson plan in my freshman class in fall 2022 after we had completed George Takei's graphic memoir *They Called Us Enemy*, which is about the Japanese American incarceration during World War II. I adapted this from an idea from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where visitors can take the identity of a real person as they tour the museum.

This lesson is designed to create empathy among students for the Japanese Americans who were imprisoned in the camps. Students were instructed to pack a suitcase with real clothes and items they would need if going on a trip. They did not know where they were going, what the weather would be like, or how long their stay would be, just like the Japanese Americans. I gave an incentive of points for completing this, and each student brought a suitcase.

When they entered the classroom, each student was given an authentic "tag" such as the Japanese Americans were given during their travel time. It had the name of a real person who lived at Camp Amache (an internment camp in Colorado about 3.5 hours from our school). Each tag had a few questions on the back. The student used [this link to the Amache Camp Directory Map](#) (University of Denver) to open a map and answer the questions on the back of the tag, including their "home" during the internment and basic information about family and camp life. A sample of the tag follows the lesson plan.

Before they started working on the website, I demonstrated on the Smart Board how to operate the map (5-10 minutes). After that, the class aid and I circulated around the room to help them find answers (20 minutes). When everyone found their answers, we shared the information orally. Students also explained what they had in their suitcase that would be helpful for life in the camp and what they wish they had packed (5-10 min). This is a small class, so times might have to be adjusted for larger groups.

Following that, we listened to part one of an [audio of Sab Shimono](#), a Japanese American who was incarcerated at Camp Amache as a young boy, just as George Takei was incarcerated at Camp Rohwer as a young boy. Students were given a cloze listening sheet to complete as they listened to the audio.

The next day we concluded the audio and researched activities their assigned person would likely have done at Camp Amache. This information was obtained from the [Camp Amache website](#) under the historical significance tab.

This was one of the most successful lessons we have had in this class. Even though students thought it was 'weird' to bring a suitcase to class, students from other classes asked many questions about the suitcases, and it generated a lot of excitement and enthusiasm. In addition to the factual information, my ultimate goal of reinforcing empathy for others was achieved. Encouraging empathy for others is ongoing, but this was a successful step in the process. I definitely plan to try this lesson again with other classes.

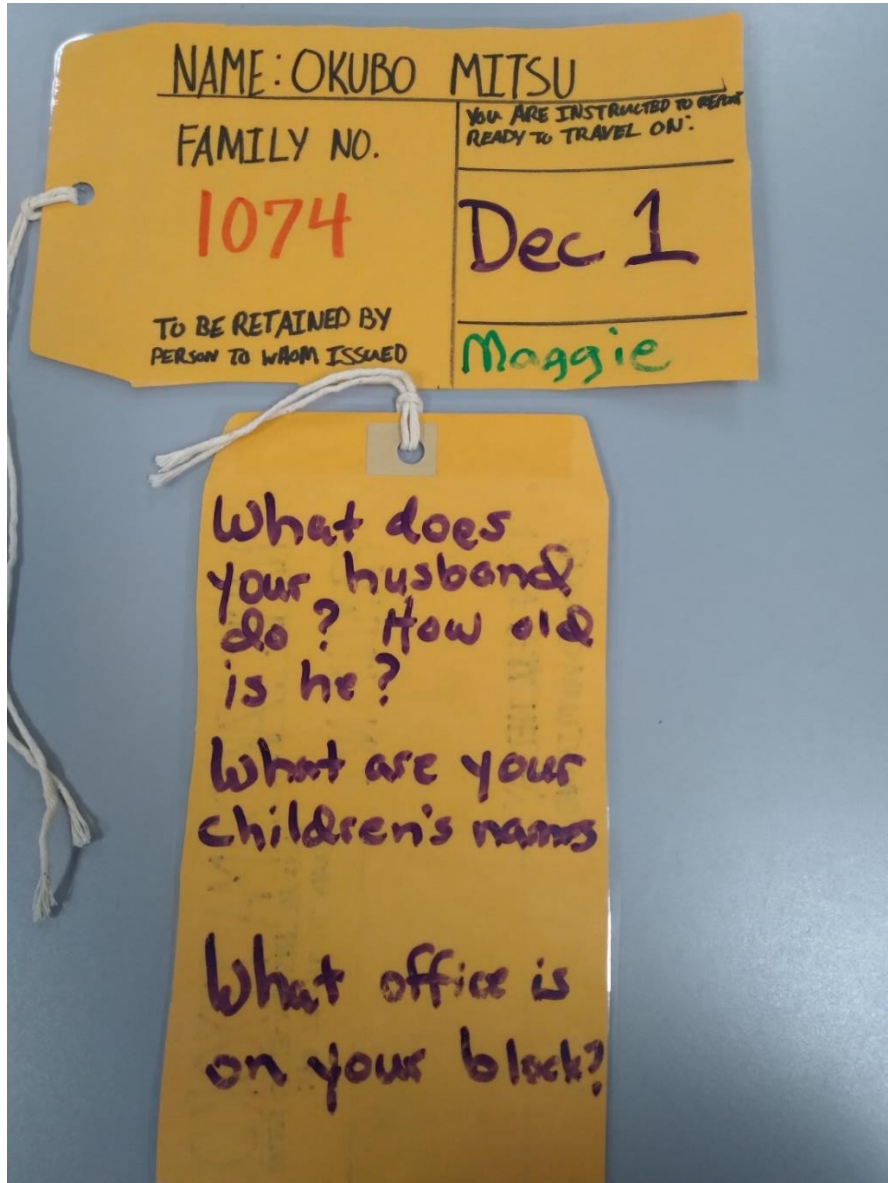
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Author Biography

Carolyn Nelson is an English teacher at Wheatland High School in Grainfield, Kansas. She grew up in Northwest Kansas and has travelled many roads just to end up a few miles from her childhood home. Carolyn has a B.A. and a M.A. in English. She has been fortunate to travel much of the United States as well as a few other countries, including short trips to Japan, Canada, Mexico, Germany, and a nine-month stay in France. It's safe to say she enjoys travelling! Carolyn also enjoys reading the stories of many different cultures. People and their stories are fascinating to her.

Teaching Tip: We Really Need to Listen

Jeremy M. Gulley

Fort Scott Community College

I would like to offer more of a reminder than a tip. Listen. In fall 2022, I taught a general literature class at a small community college in which we read, in part, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, by Audrey Neffenger. In one scene, the author lists books found in Henry's apartment. The books contained heady authors like Aristotle and William Burroughs, but also a copy of *Winnie the Pooh*. I asked the class why they thought the character had *Winnie the Pooh* with all these other books. They told me that the character probably had this children's book when he was a child and it served as a reminder of innocence and simpler times, so he kept it.

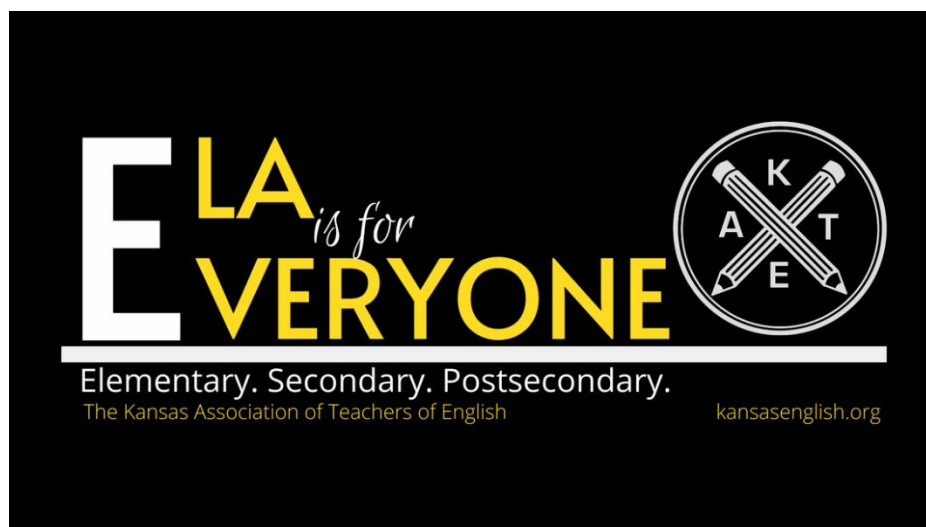
I then asked the students what books they have kept as adults that they enjoyed as kids. One student, when asked, demurred and shook her head. I pressed again and she whispered, "I didn't have any books." In response, I asked what books she wished she had. She said, without hesitation, "*The Little Mermaid*."

Because I believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to read and enjoy children's books, even if they aren't children, I bought her a book of Disney princesses and also *If you Give a Mouse a Cookie* and gave these to her in class. The student was overwhelmed and told me they were her first children's books she'd ever had. The next week a classmate brought some of her own books to share with this student.

Since we do not have a formal library in our school, all of the students decided to create a "Take a book, leave a book," area in our small school. This way, they said, anyone who walks through the door can have an opportunity to read. This moment reminded me that the classroom is about more than the subject matter being taught, and how it's important to listen, really listen, to what's being said.

Author Biography

Jeremy Gulley likes to teach, travel, meet interesting people, and have adventures.



Teaching Tip: Delight in the Thrill of Collaboration

Marianne Kunkel

Johnson County Community College

Ever since I worked for a literary journal as a graduate student and helped plan events that paired an author's reading with a musician's original song, artist's ceramics display, or a photographer's black and white prints, I've loved interdisciplinary collaborations. So, it's been thrilling over the years to incorporate interdisciplinary projects into the English classroom. Most recently, in my Introduction to Children's Literature classes at Johnson County Community College, I collaborated with a biology professor to form pairs of students across our two classrooms; pairings occur after her zoology students put forward a list of animals and my students each sign up for an animal. The end product is a children's picture book in which the animal is the main character, and the plot must balance biological accuracy with literary creativity. Sound difficult? It can be, but the joy is in the collaborative steps along the way.

The biology professor and I have a similar vision for making this project fun and also challenging. She steers her students toward offering unique animals, such as the tardigrade, dik dik, or secretary bird, and once my students sign up for the animal of their choice (sign-up sheets are easy to construct on Canvas or other learning management software), the zoology and children's literature students meet in-person. At the meeting, the zoology student delivers a one-page fact sheet about the animal and answers any questions my student might have about placing this animal into a plot-driven book. I give my students a 32-page storyboard template in which they can map out text (no more than 400 words for picture books) and sketch illustrations. The zoology student then peer-reviews this storyboard, serving as a fact checker for biology accuracy. This is the point at which some of my student's ideas to place their animal in a restaurant or portray them wearing clothes get nixed, and although this step can sometimes be frustrating for my students, they learn the important lesson of doing research on a subject that is outside their personal experience.

After the storyboard process and a green light from their zoology partner, my students fill out a paper packet with their final draft, and I ship this off to be professionally printed. Each student gets a free copy of their book, and bigger than the smile on their face to hold a book they authored are the smiles on the children's faces who get to hear the stories; our on-campus day care kindly allows our zoology/literature student pairs to read their animal-themed picture books to their toddler and Pre-K classes. There isn't a better test of whether a children's book works than to read it in front of a young, wiggly audience. And there isn't a better feeling than to stand in the day care with the biology professor and her students and know that what we made together couldn't have been made individually, that we needed each other's expertise to create something special and learn the value of blending disciplines.



Students display the children's book they collaboratively wrote, illustrated, and published.

Author Biography

Marianne Kunkel is the author of *Hillary, Made Up* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press) and *The Laughing Game* (Finishing Line Press), as well as poems that have appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. She is an Assistant

Professor of English at Johnson County Community College. She holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Florida and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. While earning her Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she was the managing editor of *Prairie Schooner* and the African Poetry Book Fund. She is the co-editor-in-chief of *Kansas City Voices* and *Kansas City Voices Youth*.



Mary Harrison's classroom library at Wichita West High School