

{ } LESSON

How to Write a How-To

by Jory John, 826
Valencia

GRADES 5–6

TYPE
INFORMATIONAL

COMMITMENT
1 SESSION: 1 HOUR

Everybody everywhere has a hidden talent, ability, or wealth of knowledge. Yes, *you* do too. If I had to take a guess, I would say that you, gentle reader, are passionate about chess, making mix tapes, and parallel parking. In fact, you could probably teach a comprehensive course about these three things. I could be wrong. You know yourself better than I do. But you get the idea. (The idea is: you have areas of interest that other people don't.)

Your students, of course, have plenty of different talents and interests, and now you're going to help them harness all of it into a fun series of how-tos. The key to this exercise is to get your class thinking about what lesson, exactly, they can share with their peers and the world at large. Today, *they* will be the teachers, and their lessons should reflect the variety of interests in your class. Encourage your students to come up with something from their lives outside school. Maybe somebody has a parent who's a chef and that student can offer up some acquired cooking tips. Maybe there's a sports star in your midst, or a video-game conqueror. What about somebody who

can do long division in her head, or a three-ball juggler? There are no wrong answers when it comes to what you know or what you can teach.

SESSION:

YOU WILL NEED

- Lesson Handouts
- Paper
- Pens

HOW TO BEGIN (10 MINUTES)

The first step of the lesson is to review the “How to Avoid a Shower or Bath for as Long as Possible, or Even Longer” handout. Let your students know that it’s OK to use humor in their approach. Additionally, it’s OK to be a bit scheme-y in their lesson, as long as it’s legal. These how-tos can absolutely be lessons on how to get away with fun stuff.

As a warm-up, open the topic for classwide discussion. Ask the students to offer up some of their hidden talents or secret knowledge. Get five students to share out loud. Simply ask them: “What are you really good at? What can you do? Any hidden talents?” Open up with one of your own hidden talents. What about that thing about parallel parking?

STEP 1 (15 MINUTES)

Next, have the students individually make a list of 25 things that they know how to do well. These lists will be all over the place. Let them know that the more specific, the better. For instance, “How to Be Really Quiet” is fine, but “How to Tiptoe Across the Living Room and into the Kitchen at Midnight to Get a Late-Night Snack” is way better. “How to Kick a Goal in Soccer”? Pretty good. But “How to

Kick a Goal in Soccer During the Championships in Double Overtime” is simply great.

If any students are struggling, hand them the list of suggested how-to ideas. These will help get the ideas rolling. In fact, they can even “borrow” from that list if they see anything that jumps out at them.

STEP 2 (10 MINUTES)

After the students have written their 25 items, have them review them and circle their three favorites. (These should be things that the students think they can expand into six instructional points.)

Go around the class and have each student read his or her three favorites out loud. After each student has read, ask the class for input. What’s the most original item that that student has on her list? (Talking about items beforehand will also ensure that there are no duplicate how-tos in your eventual book.)

STEP 3 (20 MINUTES)

Now, with the class’s input, the student should select his or her ultimate “how-to” category. Students will need to come up with a list of instructions explaining how to employ their talent. Have them refer back to the “Shower or Bath” handout as a reference. Get the students to boil their instructions down to six main points, which they will write on the handout. Once the students have their six steps, have them draw small illustrations to go with each instruction.

STEP 4 (5 MINUTES)

Have students stand up and read their how-tos out loud. The timing on this final stage is flexible. If you have limited time, you may ask for a few volunteers to share, with more reading their pieces during another class period. You can also have students get into small groups or pairs to share and

learn from each other.

STEP 5 (BONUS)

After students have had the chance to share their pieces, collect them. Let the students know that you'll be making copies and turning them into books for everybody to use. In the final moments, take suggestions for book titles. A silent vote should indicate the winner. And now you have a book of knowledge, written by your students, useful to everyone.