**Unit of Study: Inquiry into Magazines**

**Grade Level:** 4/5 (Julie Waugh)  
**Date:** Spring

### Planning Units of Study: Center for Inquiry

**Envisioning Possibilities: Planning on Paper**

*Our best planning comes from making predictions and creating conditions* for students to engage in particular kinds of thinking (for example, strategies, skills, and content connections).  
*When planning demonstrations or engagements,* it is critical to ask ourselves what kind of thinking, conversations, and learning strategies we want to promote.

### Bringing Plans to Life

*Curriculum is the transaction occurring among teacher, students, and resources within and across curricular structures; such as morning meetings, reading, writing, and math workshops, and units of study in the social and physical sciences.*

*Responsive teaching* is about identifying patterns in kidwatching data and planning responsively for individuals, small groups, and for whole-class instruction. From kidwatching to curriculum, from moment to moment, as well as planning ahead—the teacher designs minilessons deciding what or who to highlight during strategy sharing sessions.

*Creating curriculum with and for children* to help them think, work, and communicate as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and social scientists by working within an apprenticeship model (working in front of, alongside, and behind students).

*(Mills with CFI faculty, 2008)*

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Beliefs that Underpin this Inquiry

- Student interest is one of the most powerful seeds for inquiry. This study grew out of the interest of a group of students in the classroom. My job as a teacher became to follow their lead and provide support, resources, and organizational structures as they created their own publications.
- Reading magazines like writers and looking closely at magazines generated a substantial part of our learning in this inquiry. Inquiry starts by looking closely and with different lenses from different perspectives.
- Students need a time and place to write! Writers workshop is an important part of our weekly rituals and provided an opportune structure to help students write their own magazines.
- Students were able to choose what kind of magazine article to create. This freedom of choice is important for student investment and interest in the process.
- Reflecting on my own experience in writing magazine articles (and being an avid magazine reader) was an important first step in creating and implementing this writers workshop curriculum alongside my students.

Questions to Frame this Particular Inquiry

- What is unique about magazines?
- Do magazines write for a certain audience? How much do you have to think about audience as you write a magazine piece?
- What do we like about magazines?
- What kinds of magazines are there? What kind of writing is in magazines?
- What organizational strategies do writers use in magazine articles?
- When were magazines invented? Why?
- What are some of the unique writing characteristics of magazines?
- What can we find out about how magazines are written produced?
- How does artwork or photographs play a role in magazines? How could they play a role in our magazines?
- What makes a magazine reader friendly?
- Whose voices are represented in the magazine you create? Whose are absent?

Method(s) or Investigation(s) that will Promote Authentic Inquiry

How might students learn the skillfulness of inquiry? Given the questions posed, would observations, interviews, experiments, surveys, controlled studies, or other methods best support this inquiry?

- Writers workshop offers students crucial, sustained time for writing. By utilizing the authoring cycle, students write as professional authors do, by drafting, conferring with others about their writing, self-editing, outside and adult editing, and publishing their written works.
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- Students are challenged to write in many different styles including expository, narrative, poetry, and nonfiction.
- Writers workshop is also a time when we focus on language, conventions, editing skills, voice in writing, and other components of the writing craft.
- Writers workshop happens three times a week, and encompasses around six hours of curricular time per week.
- Students work on the computer to draft and edit.
- Writers workshop sessions often begin with a focus lesson, introducing a writing skill or craft that I invite students to think about and incorporate in their writing.
- Writers workshop concludes by publishing our writing, sharing successful excerpts from our writing in progress, sharing out ideas that connect to the focus lesson at the beginning of writer’s workshop, or successful strategies for writing.

Key Demonstrations and Engagements throughout this Inquiry
What are the primary teaching and learning strategies to be employed?

- McKay and Katie share out their new interest in creating magazines to all.
- Immerse into magazines! Time to read magazines and share what we notice about them.
- Guided questions to help students focus on and write about aspects of magazine articles.
- Read and share a magazine article as a “Today’s Reading.” Focus on specific aspects of the structure of the article “Suck It Up,” Dwell magazine, October 2003. (It incorporates unique and friendly way to format interviews.) Invite students to share what they notice about the article and what new ideas it gives them about magazine articles.
- Create a collaborative list of all of the different kinds of magazine articles we notice and may choose to write. Publish this in the classroom.
- Start writing, using the authoring cycle.
- Share my magazine article process through rough drafts, final published copy, and story of how I wrote it.
- Make magazine groups based on articles students have chosen to write. Assign tasks and offer support to groups (for example, choosing a title, formatting, and working to pull articles together into a complete magazine).
- Use writers workshop and work through all parts of the authoring cycle.
- Publish for each other and the school!

Envisioning a Possible Touchstone Experience
Just as touchstone texts are accessed throughout units of study in reading and writing workshop and revisited over and over again to deepen and broaden learning, touchstone experiences are foundational to units of study in the sciences and social sciences. Field studies, visits to the pond, author studies, summer inquiry, science experiments, teaching/learning projects, genealogy projects and expert projects are a few examples of touchstone experiences. Given the key demonstrations and engagements planned, which one might best serve as a touchstone experience?
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- The touchstone experience for our magazine inquiry happened before we started to officially work on magazine together. Students had started to create their own magazines, including taking folders of possible articles for their magazines to lunch! The pivotal experience came when I discovered our school assistant trying to copy a magazine for our class that a student had given to her and I knew nothing about! In the midst of such interest in creating and sharing magazines, my role became to help organize, coach, support, and honor their interest and ideas with curricular class time.

### Strategies, Skills, Content, and Concepts to Addressed Through Demonstrations, Engagements, and Touchstone Experiences

**What standards will be uncovered through this inquiry?**

- Choose a topic, generate ideas, and use oral and written prewriting strategies.
- Plan for audience and purpose and generate drafts that use a logical progression of ideas to develop a specific topic.
- Develop an extended response around a central idea, using relevant supporting details.
- Revise writing for clarity, sentence variety, precise vocabulary, and effective phrasing through collaboration, conferencing, and self-evaluation.
- Edit for language conventions such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, agreement, sentence structure (syntax), and word choice.
- Write and publish in a variety of formats.
- Write multiple-paragraph compositions and expressive and informational pieces.
- Begin writing essays, reports, articles, and proposals.
- Use writing to explain and inform.
- Use writing to learn, entertain, and describe.
- Use texts to make connections and to support ideas in own writing.

### Strategies for Reflecting on and Documenting Learning

**How might we demonstrate growth and change? What are our new questions?**

- Writers notebooks and prewriting notes capture ideas and to help write articles.
- Students draft on the computer, using the authoring cycle. Use a Record Sheet to keep track of progress and fellow collaborators.
- Students keep copies of drafts as they craft by printing out at the end of each draft. Mark comments on drafts as they work through authors circles and adult edits, and save them to look at decisions and changes students make as writers.
- Publish magazines for the class and the school. This was a huge celebration as we took time to read and enjoy the magazines.
Reflexivity: Studying Ourselves and the Implementation of this Unit of Study to Grow and to Change

How did it go? What do we want to hold onto? What do we want to revise?

- Make a concerted effort to keep publishing a magazine throughout the year. Not only would this accomplish the important aspects mentioned above, but would serve as a great “nest” for students to be working on their own pieces throughout the year in writers workshop.
- Student wrote wonderful and diverse articles for our class magazines. Many were about animals. There is no doubt that this connects to the facts that the magazine resources that we focused on most together were National Geographic Explorer. We did have a variety of magazines in the classroom after our invitation for students to bring in magazines that they read and enjoyed. I would help us all focus on a wider variety of magazines through shared readings.
- The greatest addition I would make to this inquiry is inviting an expert in the field of magazines to visit our classroom to answer our questions and talk about writing or publishing a magazine. Perhaps a field study to visit a magazine office would be possible.

Data Sources (primary and secondary) to Support this Inquiry: Envisioning Text Sets with Books, Videos, and Artifacts

- Copies of National Geographic Explorer! Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society. (Use any year, any issue.)
- “Suck it Up,” Dwell magazine, October 2003.
- Examples of magazines brought in by students that represent the kinds of magazines they like and read on their own.

Possible Guiding Questions for Planning

Conceptual

- Perspectives: Which perspectives (reader, writer, mathematician, scientist, and/or social scientist) offer potential insights or strategies for investigating this unit of study, i.e., What questions would a social scientist ask and how might she investigate this issue? What questions would a mathematician ask about this topic?
- Systems: What systems are involved in this unit and how are they related?
- Cycles: Are there cycles embedded in this unit of study? How might we gain a deeper understanding of the unit by investigating the natural and man-made cycles?
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• Change: Has change occurred over time in relation to this unit of study? If so, how might studying the natural or man-made changes help us better understand the topic?
• Voice: Whose voice is heard or privileged? Whose voice is absent or silenced?
• Power: How might power structures help us better understand this issue?

Pragmatic/Universal
• Who developed the idea, invention, or concept?
• Why was the idea or invention created? What was the purpose of the invention give the context and culture of the time period?
• Where did the knowledge or information presented in the materials we are reading in this unit of study come from? Can we trust or believe it? Do we need to access multiple sources to triangulate our knowledge or understanding?
• Have common knowledge, beliefs, or understandings about this topic changed over time? What led to shifts in our beliefs or understandings?

Personal Knowledge
• Why does this knowledge or information matter to me?
• How has what I have learned during this unit changed me?

Social Knowledge
• Why does the knowledge I’m learning in this unit of study matter in the world?

From Personal Knowledge to Social Action
• So what?
• Now what? How might we take action on what we have learned during this unit of study?
• How might we show or demonstrate what we have learned during this unit to others?

(Mills 2013)