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Writing Bootcamp Unit
Thesis Statement & Support Group Activity

ABSTRACT:

This is not an introduction to the thesis statement, but serves well as a second or reinforcing lesson. This activity asks students to practice, in the comfort of a group, drawing out and expressing complete, coherent statements from an essay. These statements will be in four areas of criticism: intention, tone, world view and skill; the teams of students will shape these statements into theses. This activity requires one entire class of at least 60 minutes.

PROCEDURE:

From the book of essays, *In Brief*, edited by Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones, students come to class having read three: N. Scott Momaday's "The Indian Dog"; Rich Bass's "January 13"; and Patricia Hampl's "Come Eat."

On the board you will see these three titles. Go to the board and put your name under the title of the one you prefer. Your partners will be the other students who have signed up for that essay.

When the table groups are established, you will come to consensus with your group on the following:

- The tone of the essay (light, serious, satirical, reflective, angry, etc.)
- Some specific words, phrases or sentences which create the tone
- The writer's audience
- What the writer is really talking about (the universal idea or theme)
- The topic that the writer uses to "disguise" what he or she is talking about

When you have achieved consensus, it's time to begin experimenting with thesis statements. A thesis is an efficient, focused statement of the argument you are going to make in a paper. It is not a statement of fact, but rather a statement that could provoke disagreement. If you propose a thesis such as "Cats are mammals," no one is going to disagree, and thus, you've not written a thesis. If, on the other hand, you propose that "As pets, cats are far superior to dogs in every way," you could have a fight on your hands.

As a group, we will examine some sample thesis statements written by students not in this class. Some good; some stink. We will determine which is which and why. Then, in your table

groups, you will begin constructing thesis statements of your own, relevant to the essay you've chosen.

Your thesis will be an argument that you wish to make about the author's 1) intention; 2) tone; 3) world view, or, 4) skill. In your group, and as a group, craft a common thesis for each of the aforementioned topics. When you have written the four theses to the best of your ability, one member of your group will go to the board, and under the title of the relevant essay, write your four thesis statements.

The Nobel Thesis Committee will then make its selection.

MATERIALS:

Class set of essay collection, In Brief, edited by Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones. (I asked students to read N. Scott Momaday's "The Indian Dog;" Rick Bass's "January 13;" and Patricia Hampl's "Come Eat," though any reasonably rich essays can be used.)

Supports Common Core Standards W 9-10.1 and W 9-10.4.