Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
• Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow their writing focus for a realistic fiction story.
• Work with a partner to evaluate their own story ideas using the questions.
• Discuss the strategy and how they can apply it to their own writing.

Explain the Process

Say: Writers usually have more than one idea for writing a story, so we need a way to choose the one that's best. In other words, we need to narrow our focus. One way to do that is to ask questions about each of our ideas. Then we can use our answers to decide which idea will work best. Let me show you how I ask three questions about each of my ideas when I need to decide which one will make the best story.

Model Evaluating Realistic Fiction Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a Realistic Fiction Ideas Evaluation chart like the one shown here on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample ideas on the chart or substitute ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

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Preparation

Materials Needed
• Chart paper and markers
• Realistic Fiction Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Realistic Fiction Ideas Evaluation chart onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realistic Fiction Ideas</th>
<th>Do I like this story idea?</th>
<th>Can I make this story interesting?</th>
<th>Can I solve the problem?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>getting lost at a circus</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forgetting to do my homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>losing my sister’s iPod®</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Realistic Fiction Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: I do like this idea for a story. It's something that happened to me when I was a child and I think it would make a good story. It would be a good story problem. I'll put “yes” in the first column. If I had answered “no” to this question, do you think this idea would be a good one for me to write about? (Allow responses.) Probably not! If I'd decided that I didn’t like the idea anymore, I wouldn’t enjoy the work it would take to make it a really good story.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: I do think I can write a good story about this idea—a story that someone else would like to read. I can explain what happened and make my story more interesting by using good descriptions and details. So I’ll write “yes” to the second question, too.

Read aloud third evaluation question. Say: I can think of several ways to solve the story problem if I use this idea. I could say that the child asked a police officer for help. Or, maybe I could solve the problem in a funny way. What if the elephant trainer let the lost child ride home on an elephant? Wouldn’t that be
Fun? Just imagine what the neighbors would think! For my story to be good, my readers will want to know about the problem and how it was solved. I’m sure I can do that with this idea, so I’ll write “yes” here, too.

Continue modeling how to evaluate your ideas as time allows. Make sure to include some “no” answers so students understand how to narrow their ideas.

Explain that as students evaluate ideas, they might end up with two or more ideas about which they have answered “yes” to all the questions. If this happens, encourage students to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

- Which idea would allow me to create the most interesting characters?
- Which idea would readers be most interested in?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation questions on the chart to one idea they have for a realistic story. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share an idea they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Ask students to discuss how using the questions helped them focus on a single idea.

Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the questions on the chart.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Display the following sentence frames on chart paper. Model how students will use them as they evaluate their idea with a partner during “Practice Narrowing the Focus.”

I like/do not like this story idea because ______.
I can make this story interesting by ______.
A good way to solve the problem is ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: interesting/interesante; problem/el problema; solve/resolver.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus when we’re choosing an idea for a realistic fiction story. When you’re evaluating your ideas for a story, you can use the same chart to help you decide which one will work best.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their realistic fiction topics during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite any students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the topics they have chosen for their realistic fiction stories.