Use Real-Life Problems to Brainstorm Ideas

1. Focus

Explain Brainstorming Real-Life Problems and Situations

Say: Realistic fiction is about things that really could happen, so when realistic fiction writers brainstorm, they often think about situations and problems that happen to people in real life. They use their own experiences and their observations of other people in the world around them for inspiration. They think of real-life situations that people can identify with. They think about problems many people have faced. Then they use these problems and situations in their stories. Today I’m going to show you how I think of story ideas by thinking about real-life events.

Model Brainstorming Real-Life Problems and Situations

Think aloud to show how you use real-life problems to brainstorm story ideas. Use the sample think-aloud or develop your own think-aloud to share with students. Demonstrate how you record ideas on chart paper as you brainstorm.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I remember something that happened when I was in the fifth grade. A new girl joined our class, and some kids were not very nice to her. I wasn’t mean to her, but when I look back, I could have been nicer. I could have done more to make her feel welcome. Now I think about how hard that must have been for her. I think I could write a story about someone who comes to a new school. I could put myself in the new person’s shoes and show how sad she feels until someone offers to be her friend. I think a lot of readers could identify with that experience, and it has meaning for me. I’m going to write that idea down on my brainstorming web. Continue talking about ideas and adding them to the web.

Sample Brainstorming Web

- getting lost in a shopping mall
- feeling shy at a new school
- going on a trip and missing the plane
- the electricity goes off before a big party
- stories that could really happen

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn that one strategy for brainstorming realistic fiction ideas is to think about real-life problems that people can have.
• Work in small groups to share ideas for stories about problems that could really happen.
• Contribute to a class list of ideas for realistic fiction stories.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, you may wish to copy on chart paper the sample sentence frames in “Strategies to Support Els” to help students talk about their realistic story ideas.
2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming Real-Life Problems and Situations

Invite students to work with partners to brainstorm topics for a realistic story. Explain that students should record any ideas they have in their writer’s notebooks. If students have difficulty getting started, encourage them to think of problems and situations kids their age face at home, in school, or with their friends. These are all real-life situations that they could write about.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need more support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students back together and encourage them to share ideas that they brainstormed by thinking of real-life situations. As students contribute story ideas, record them on your class brainstorming web. Reread the ideas together and note the similarities and differences between the ideas students generated. Note that some situations are shared by many students, while others may be unique to one person. All of them can make good stories!

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Today we learned that you can brainstorm realistic story ideas by thinking about the real-life problems and situations people face. Realistic fiction, after all, is about characters and events that could really exist. Remember to use this strategy as you come up with new story ideas.

Encourage students to apply the brainstorming strategy during independent writing time, as appropriate. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share the ideas they are generating during independent writing time.

Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Invite beginning ELs to draw a picture of something that could happen in real life. Ask them to tell you about their pictures. Help to expand their oral language by putting their ideas into simple sentences.

**Intermediate**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers. Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk with their partners about their realistic story ideas:

-One situation that happens in real life is ______.
-One problem people have is ______.

**Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner brainstorming activity.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: character/el carácter; problem/el problema; situation/la situación.