Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Objectives

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

Preparation

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

Advanced Preparation
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Science Fiction Ideas Evaluation chart onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. Also copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs,” if necessary.

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: We often have several ideas for a piece of writing, so we need a way to decide which ideas will work best. We need a way to narrow the focus. One way is to ask ourselves questions about each idea. Then we can use our answers to help us decide which ideas we should still consider and which ones we should discard. We can ask different types of questions depending on what genre we are writing. Let me show you how asking key questions about each of my ideas works when I need to choose an idea for a science fiction story.

Model Evaluating Science Fiction Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a Science Fiction Ideas Evaluation chart like the one shown for this lesson or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample science fiction ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Fiction Ideas</th>
<th>Do I like this science fiction concept as a story idea?</th>
<th>Can I make this story idea interesting?</th>
<th>Can I create an interesting problem and solution?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>someone creates a learning pill</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a huge meteor hits the Earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people stop growing old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>robots became the world’s only soldiers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample Science Fiction Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: I do like this idea for a story and I know liking the topic is going to make writing it a lot more fun. I’ll put “yes” in the first column. If I didn’t like the story idea and wrote “no” on the chart, I wouldn’t continue asking questions about the idea. I would go to the next topic.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: When I write my story, I’ll need to choose a setting and characters that people will enjoy reading about. I’ll also need to write about them in a way that makes them seem real. Using details and descriptions to explain what’s happening will be very important, but I think I can do that as I write. I’ll answer “yes” to the second question, too.
Read aloud third evaluation question. Say: I can imagine a lot of things that could happen if people could just take a pill to learn whatever they wanted to know. I wish I had one now! I can think of several ways my story could unfold. Maybe my main character could start off liking the pill and then change his mind. What kind of problems could a learning pill cause? How would it change our lives? What could it make us decide about the whole process of learning? I can think of several interesting problems and solutions for this story idea. I’ll write “yes” in the last column, 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 in which they have answered “yes” to the questions. If this happens, encourage students to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

- Which idea do I feel most strongly about?
- Which idea might give me the most interesting characters?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

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

Share Ideas

Bring students back together and invite volunteers to share ideas they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Discuss how using the evaluation chart helped them narrow their focus to come up with the best idea.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned what kind of questions we can ask ourselves in order to narrow our focus when we’re trying to select a science fiction story idea. You can use this same chart to evaluate your ideas during independent writing time.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their science 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 students together. Invite students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share their science fiction topics.

Strategies to Support ELs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the questions on the chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners as they evaluate their ideas during the “Practice Narrowing the Focus” activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Levels</td>
<td>If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: decide/decidir, interesting/interesante, problem/el problema, solution/la solución.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>