



EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Mrs. Shenk is a third grade teacher whose students recently created “Freaky Frog Trading Cards” that included a research based narrative paragraph about a frog with unusual characteristics. This writing was part the work students did in the Module “Adaptations and the Wide World of Frogs”. Students read a wide variety of informational texts to build their knowledge frogs and the adaptations that help them survive.

Students began the module by building knowledge about frogs through the careful study of an informational text, *Bullfrog at Magnolia Circle*. With teacher support, students began to use a common graphic organizer to help them take notes about the bullfrog and organize those notes into categories (e.g. habitat, physical attributes, life cycle, predators and prey and behaviors).

Students then transitioned to building knowledge about the wider world of frogs, focusing on “freaky frogs” that have special adaptations. After reading many rich informational texts, students took notes about their own “freaky frog,” using the same graphic organizer more independently. They made comparisons between the common bullfrog and their own freaky frog so that they could consider what unique adaptation helped their frog survive. Their frog’s unique adaptation became the focus for their informational narrative paragraph.

To help students envision what a strong paragraph would look like, Mrs. Shenk had the class examine a strong model Trading Card. The class spent time identifying specific writing criteria that made the model strong (e.g. strong verbs or vivid and precise language). After spending time with this model, even many of Mrs. Shenk’s weaker writers seemed confident enough to dive in.

As they prepared to write, students reread *Bullfrog at Magnolia Circle* that they had studied closely in Unit 1. This time, they read it as a mentor text. Examining this beautifully written informational text through the lens of a writer helped inspire students. They identified vivid and precise words the author chose to describe the bullfrog, and then considered how to apply similar writing techniques in order to effectively describe their freaky frog’s unique adaptations in a way that would engage readers. Students also used the vocabulary that they learned in this text, and the other informational texts they had read throughout the module, to help them describe frog behaviors in their own writing.

Then, students began the process of planning, writing, revising, critiquing, and re-revising their work based on feedback from their peers and the teacher. Specific and focused revision lessons about using vivid and precise words, followed by structured critique sessions, helped students make their work stronger. During each step of the writing process, students had opportunities to share their work with their peers. Students learned how to give specific feedback to others, and also had opportunities to reflect on, and assess the quality of their own writing. Mrs. Shenk gave them several useful self assessment tools and checklists to help students determine their next steps as writers.

Mrs. Shenk noted how much more powerful the process of writing became when students had a specific model to look at for their own writing, identified the criteria that made that model strong, and had many chances to get feedback and revise. She was struck by how hard students were willing to work on their Trading Cards, and how excited students were to share their finished products with their peers.