

Painting an Essay

Central Idea

To show understanding, writers select and organize evidence to support a big idea.

Students Will Learn

The parts of an essay and their purposes

Materials:

- 1 copy of The Painted Essay template (preferably on heavy white stock) for each student
- 1 brush for each student
- 1 set of watercolor paints (red, yellow, blue, green) and a cup of water for each pair of students
- A small cup, tray, or piece of wax paper (for mixing paints) for each student
- Projected image of The Painted Essay and tools for coloring the image red, yellow, blue, and green
- Copy of any poem

Lesson Overview

In this introductory lesson, you will use a projected image and color to introduce the form and content of a basic essay. You will explain the parts of the Painted Essay one paragraph at a time, filling in each section with the appropriate color as you go. Instruct your students to paint each paragraph immediately after you have explained and modeled adding color. The lesson plan includes sample dialogue to help you in your explanation of each part. Keep in mind that this lesson is only an introduction. The focus of this lesson is simply on associating a name and color with each paragraph in an essay. This will give your class a common language of craft, which will provide a solid base for writing instruction. Later lessons in how to use color to analyze models and their own writing will help your students develop a deeper understanding of these important concepts.

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Lesson Plan

Before you begin:

- Give each student a copy of the blank Painted Essay.
- Set up the watercolor paint sets so that students have their own brush and easy access to paints, water, and a mixing cup or tray.
- Display the projected image of the Painted Essay and prepare to model how to add color to each paragraph.

Introducing the Lesson

To start, hold up a poem. Introduce the idea of using a structure to support writing using dialogue similar to the sample below. Sample dialogue is provided in italics throughout the lesson plan.

What type of writing is this? How do you know? Some kinds of writing, like poems, have special shapes or forms. Today we are going to learn about the form of a basic essay.

Look at the Painted Essay sheet on your desk. How many paragraphs are there? Each of the four paragraphs has a name and a special job or function. We will give each paragraph its own color to help us remember its name and purpose in the essay.

Painting an Essay

Follow the directions below and use dialogue similar to the samples provided to introduce each paragraph of the essay. Have students color-code the essay template as you explain the name and function of each paragraph.

Introduction and Focus

Point to the first paragraph on the projected image. Explain that the first paragraph is called the **introduction**.

The job of the introduction is to give some background information, or context, so that the reader can understand the piece. The introduction must also catch your readers' attention, so that they will want to read more! Red is a "catchy" color, so let's paint this paragraph red. Watch how I color this paragraph, stopping at the line over the word focus. Be careful—do not color the focus statement yet.

Model this process by coloring the top block of the introduction red on the projected image. When most have finished, instruct students to put their brushes down so you will have their complete attention as you explain the next part of the essay. Assure students who have not finished painting that you will give them time at the end of the lesson to complete their essay. Follow this same general procedure for each paragraph.

Continue your explanation by pointing to the focus statement at the end of the introduction. *At the end of this paragraph is a very important sentence called the **focus statement**. Your focus statement tells the main idea of your piece. The focus statement is the most important sentence in the piece; it steers the piece the way a steering wheel steers a car. Paint the focus, this top rectangle, of your focus statement green.*

Model this process by coloring the focus green, then introduce the points.

In this essay, the focus statement has two points. Paint "point 1" yellow and paint "point 2" blue. Put your brushes down when you have finished to show me you are ready to move on to the next step.

Model this process by coloring the points yellow and blue.

Proof Paragraph 1

Briefly check all student work before moving on to the next step. Then introduce the first proof paragraph.

The next paragraph is called **proof paragraph 1**. Its job is to give evidence and reasons to support the first point of your focus statement. What color is point one of your focus statement? Paint proof paragraph 1 yellow, like point one of your focus statement. Put your brushes down when you have finished.

Model this process by coloring proof paragraph one yellow.

Proof Paragraph 2 and Transition

Skip the line labeled “transition,” and point to proof paragraph 2 on the overhead. The next paragraph is called **proof paragraph 2**. Its job is to give evidence and reasons to support the second part of your focus statement. Skip the sentence labeled “transition” for now. Place your brush right beneath it, and paint a blue line.

Model drawing a blue line under the transition.

Now continue to paint proof paragraph 2 blue, just like point 2 of your focus.

Model coloring proof paragraph 2 blue.

Return to the transition and point to it on the projected image.

Let’s go back to the part we didn’t color. This line is called a **transition**. A transition is a sentence that moves the reader from one big point in your piece to the next. It is like a bridge between your two points. Why do you think it is both yellow and blue? Paint your transition any pattern of yellow and blue you’d like (stripes, dots, etc.), but please don’t mix the two colors.

Model coloring the transition yellow and blue, being careful not to blend the two colors.

Note: Understanding the transition can be difficult, especially for younger students. You may choose to skip the transition entirely and introduce it later in the year when students have more experience in writing essays.

Conclusion

Point to the last paragraph on the projected image.

The final paragraph is called a **conclusion**. Its job is to wrap up the piece. A conclusion has two parts: a “what” and a “so what”. In your conclusion, you want to remind the reader of your focus (what) but also add your own thinking about why what you said is important (so what). To write your conclusion, you use the ideas in proof paragraph 1 (yellow) and the ideas in proof paragraph 2 (blue) to figure out something new. Please use your paints to mix your “yellow ideas” and your “blue ideas” in your mixing cup and see what you get.

Have students mix the blue and yellow paints in the mixing cup or tray.

What happened? When you mix blue and yellow, you get a new color—green! The green shows that, after you have considered all your facts, you arrive back at your green focus. But, you’ll notice that the color you mixed is a different shade of green than your original focus—in fact, it’s unique! Everyone has a slightly different shade of green. Take a minute to look around at all the different shades of green you’ve created.

The conclusion is a unique shade of green because when you run the ideas in the yellow paragraph and the ideas in the blue paragraph through your own mind, they come together to make something new—your own thinking on the topic! Now paint your conclusion with your own special shade of green.

Wrapping Up

To finish the lesson, review all the colors and reasons for them. Then allow the essays to dry. Have your students put their Painted Essays in a folder or notebook for reference (lamine them if possible).

Remember to refer to this structure frequently throughout the year. Let the colors become part of your classroom language about writing. This first lesson will help students to acquire some basic vocabulary and develop a visual template that will lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of writing concepts. Using the colors and structure of The Painted Essay intentionally and frequently to organize ideas, analyze models, and plan their own writing will gradually move students from knowledge to understanding.

The Painted Essay®

Introduction

context

focus

point 1

point 2

Proof Paragraph 1

evidence and reasons to support point 1

transition

Proof Paragraph 2

evidence and reasons to support point 2

Conclusion

What?

So what?

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