

POSTCARDS FROM AFAR # 2

(Time Maximum)

EduDiplomacy: "I would rather go to school in . . . " Evaluative Writing with Evidence and Organization

Lesson Sketch

Skills: Students *read* text about culture and school in other countries; *interpret* data presented in table form; *reflect* on personal responses and *discuss* responses with classmates; *compare/contrast* culture and school experiences in different countries; *take notes* to *evaluate information* that is relevant/irrelevant to their writing purpose; *write a short evaluative piece* using strong evidence and organized information; *practice the complete writing process*: identify an area of curiosity, read, take notes, identify a specific audience, brainstorm, compose, seek feedback, revise, polish, publish for readers outside the classroom.

Grades: 9–10

Time: Three 90-minute classes

Featured Resources: AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com articles Country Snapshot, Cultural Overview, and Education for 175 countries

Inspirations

"The primary purpose of a liberal education is to make one's mind a pleasant place in which to spend one's time." ~Sydney J. Harris

"Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living." ~Miriam Beard

Lesson Overview

Students send postcards to their parents about schools they would like to attend in Senegal or Sweden, Belize or Belarus—wherever their imaginations take them. Students compare people's lives and school systems in any 2 of the 175 countries covered in AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com. Working individually and collaboratively, students encounter their own and their classmates' responses to unfamiliar cultures and educational practices. Expanding cultural understanding, improving reading comprehension with text and tables, and sharpening research skills, students write evaluatively about where they would prefer to go to school, supporting their preferences with concrete evidence drawn from multiple texts. Students experience the complete writing process, from first inspiration to final publication.

Lesson Steps

Working in pairs, students select 2 of the 175 countries covered in AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com. For each country, students read the articles Country Snapshot, Cultural Overview, Education Structure, UN-Based Statistics, International Schools, and Higher Education.

Students take notes together regarding similarities and differences between schools in the chosen countries. Students compare the countries' schools with their own school experiences, noting similarities and differences, familiar and new school practices and requirements. Students note for themselves and share with classmates any aspects of the educational systems that strike them as especially appealing or unappealing. Students consider higher education choices in their respective countries. Individually, imagining that they have spent a day touring their chosen country's schools, students write their postcards home (80 words), using salient facts from the articles they've read as evidence supporting their stated preferences, and thinking carefully about organizing information for specific readers: their parents. Working together as peer reviewers, students offer constructive feedback on each other's drafts. Working individually, students revise and polish their evaluative texts. Using photos from AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com, students create photomontages for their postcards, add their finished texts, and enjoy their finished pieces of writing and art. Students can mail their postcards to parents—and find out whether they are convinced.

Standards Met

1. **Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
 - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
 - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
 - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
2. **Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
 - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2
 - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
 - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9
 - d. Range of Writing 10
3. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
 - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
 - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
 - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
4. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
 - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2
 - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
 - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9
 - d. Range of Writing 10
5. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Speaking and Listening**
 - a. Comprehension and Collaboration 1, 2
 - b. Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas 4,6
6. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Language**
 - a. Conventions of Standard English 1, 2
 - b. Knowledge of Language 3
 - c. Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4, 6

7. **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards for the English Language Arts**
 - a. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
 8. **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies**
 - a. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
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Supplies

- Computer lab access with internet connection for student use of AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com
 - Access to Microsoft Word
 - Color printer access
 - Blank 6x9 postcards
 - Scissors, glue, colored pens/pencils/paints, other art supplies as desired
 - Notebooks and pens/pencils
 - Dictionaries
 - Stamps (if students will physically mail postcards)
 - Student access to postcard recipient/s addresses
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Instructional Plan

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Increase cultural literacy and develop as global citizens.
- Build skills in reading comprehension of text and tables.
- From varied reading materials, select the information that is potentially relevant to support the student's claims.
- From potentially relevant supporting information, select most compelling information for specific readers.
- Support all claims with concrete evidence.
- Present claims and evidence in an order that is clear to the reader.
- Experience the complete writing process: identify an area of curiosity, read, take notes, identify a specific audience, brainstorm, compose, seek feedback, revise, polish, publish for readers outside the classroom.
- Improve media literacy. Experience the design process by exploring the relationship between text and graphic elements.
- Find motivation for ongoing engagement with print, media, and cultural literacies via the success of a finished piece that readers will enjoy.

Teacher introduction

- Introduce the word and idea edudiplomacy: learning about culture through studying education systems.
- Let students know that many small classroom activities will lead to one writing exercise—if students participate in small assignments along the way, the final writing assignment will be a snap.
- Set ground rules for partners working together: respecting each other's ideas even if you don't agree, strategies for achieving consensus, etc.
- Pair students into partner working groups, and ask students to move to shared work stations.

Student Directions

What countries would you like to visit? Country selection

- Go to AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com
- Peruse list of countries
- Identify four countries you are curious about. Skim materials for these countries: get a quick sense of where the country is, who lives there, and whether you are curious about the place.
- Choose two countries to mentally visit for this exercise.

Where are these places? What are their histories? Who lives there now? Reading for Context

- Go to Country 1, then Country 2, and see the articles under The Country.
- Read Country Snapshot and Cultural Overview.
- Discuss the following questions together, and take individual notes on your answers:

What are your first impressions? Reflection and note taking

Discuss the following questions together, and take individual notes on your answers:

- What have you read so far that is like what you expected for these countries?
- What surprises you about these countries??
- What do you notice that these countries have in common?
- How are these countries different?
- What do you guess the school systems for these countries are like, based on what you've read so far? For instance, guess: Is school attendance required? Can kids learn at home instead of at school? How old are kids when they start/finish public school? What language/s do people speak at school? Do they wear uniforms? Can people go to college near where they grow up, or do they have to travel far away to study?
- From what you've read so far, which country do you predict you would rather attend school in?

What is the educational system? Reading for Context

- Go to Country 1, then Country 2, and under the Education menu:
- Read Structure, UN-Based Statistics, International Schools, and Higher Education
- Discuss the following questions together, and take individual notes on your answers:

Compare and Contrast School Systems: Reflection and note taking

- In which country do more students have access to school? Do you think widespread access to education is preferable? Why?
- In which country do people go to school for more years? Do you think attending school for a larger or smaller number of years overall is preferable? Why?
- In the two countries, is education coed, or are boys and girls educated separately? Does coed or gender-segregated education seem preferable to you? Why?
- How are grades assigned in your two countries?
- Which system of grading seems more appealing to you? Why?
- What is similar about the two countries' curricula? What is different?
- Which country's curriculum would you rather study, and why?
- What are the student-to-teacher ratios for your two countries? Which country's student-to-teacher ratio do you find more appealing, and why?
- Which country has a higher overall literacy rate? How does this affect your desire to live in one country or the other?
- Which country spends a greater percentage of its resources on education? How does this affect your desire to live in one country or the other?
- Take a look at the countries' lists of International Schools. Do you think you would rather attend an International School, or a "regular" school? Why?
- Read the brief descriptions of technical schools, colleges, and universities in the Higher Education article. For each country, which would be your top-choice school, and why? Which would be your top choice overall, and why?

S e s s i o n T w o

Teacher introduction

- Remind students that their notes and reflections from the class before will support their writing today. If students get stuck, they should go back and review their own prior notes.

Student Directions

Where would you rather go to school, and why? Composing

- Re-read your answers to the prompt questions about school systems in your two countries.
- Make the call: Given a choice between the schools in these two countries, where do you want to go to high school? Where do you want to go to college?
- Imagine that you spend a day touring your chosen schools. Consider how to explain why you want to study where you want to study—in a postcard written to one or both of your parents.
- From the articles you have read, what are the most convincing items you could share in favor of your preference? Make a list for yourself.
- Of those items, which are especially important to you? Which will be especially convincing to your parent or parents? Circle the especially important/convincing items on your list.
- Write the first draft of your postcard to your parent or parents (around 80 words) explaining why you want to study where you want to study. Include:
 - A hook sentence that gets the reader's attention.

- A topic sentence or topic sentences that lay out the paragraph's primary subject and/or claim—such as where you want to go to school, and why.
- Evidence from the articles you've read that supports your preference. For example, perhaps you know you'll learn better in a country with smaller class sizes. Or perhaps you know you want to attend the schools that will best prepare you for a career in astrophysics, international business, or theater design.
- A concluding statement that ends your postcard on a strong, persuasive note

Teacher introduction

- Set expectations for peer review. Review the nature of constructive criticism, and review also writer strategies for choosing what changes to make when reader feedback differs.

Student Directions

What have you missed so far? Peer Review

Students read each other's first drafts. Partners consider the following questions, share the answers with each other, and make individual notes for revision:

- What do you and your partner have in common, in terms of what you prefer in a school?
- What are the differences in how you responded to the schools of your two countries?
- How do the school experiences you've chosen compare to the school you're in right now in the US?
- Does reading your partner's postcard inspire you to make any changes? Not that you can steal your partner's text, obviously, but does his or her postcard jog your brain about any fun facts you've yet to include?
- Does your partner's hook sentence grab your attention? What are some other eye-catching facts about the chosen country that your partner could consider using as a hook?
- Do you see a clear connection between your partner's school/college preferences and the facts your partner is sharing with his/her parent/s? Is there anywhere that the connection between preference and country/school facts is unclear to you?
- What other elements of the chosen country's school system would you suggest your partner mention in support of his/her preference?
- For clarity and ease of reading, what changes would you suggest to the order in which your partner shares his/her preferences and facts?
- Are there any places in your partner's text that confuse you? If so, where? Can you make any suggestions for clarity?
- Are there any places in your partner's text where you could help with a grammatical issue? And/or do any grammatical questions come up for you as you review your partner's text? If you are both stumped about something, request a conversation with your teacher before you revise.
- Overall, if you were your partner's parent, what would you think of this postcard? How would you respond?

Teacher introduction

- Review with students the difference between revising and polishing—i.e., between changing content and changing punctuation. Suggest to students that they think of revising and polishing as a funnel-shaped set of tasks in which the writer starts big (improving transitions, making

descriptions more vivid), then works down toward the smaller details (addressing punctuation issues and spelling errors).

Student Directions

Revising

Using your partner's feedback and your own clearer perspective, make changes to your first draft in the following areas:

- Reconsider your hook. If it doesn't seem very attention catching, replace your original choice with something more exciting. Return to the articles for your country as necessary.
 - Consider your topic sentence or sentences. Is it clear from the outset what you're going to be talking about? What changes would make your purpose clearer to the reader right away?
 - Consider the connections between the preferences you are expressing and the supporting facts you present. What more relevant school or cultural facts from the country articles could you add?
 - Where, if anywhere, was your partner confused? How could you clarify?
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Polishing

Read your postcard text through one more time. Ask yourself:

- Does this make sense? Imagine: you have found this postcard in your mailbox, and have never seen it before. Is there anything in the text that you find confusing? Make changes as necessary for clarity.
- Any pieces of punctuation missing?
- All words spelled correctly? Use AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com and/or a dictionary to confirm the spelling of any unfamiliar words.

S e s s i o n T h r e e

Teacher introduction

- According to classroom supplies and logistics, instruct students as to how they will illustrate, assemble, and mail their postcards.
- If some students will be presenting their finished postcards to the class, give instructions accordingly.

Student Directions

Illustrating

- As directed by your teacher, choose, print, and cut out cuisine photos from The Country, Education, or other sections of AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com for your chosen school location.
- Create a photomontage for the back of your postcard. Questions you might ask yourself as you select photos include:
 - Does it help your reader's understanding more to see images of the schools in the chosen country, or images of the overall location? If location, would your reader's understanding benefit more from viewing pictures of the landscape, or the people, or both?

- Would you like to show your reader more soothing images, or more startling images? Would you like your pictures to include soothing or startling colors? Should the mood of your montage match your text, or contrast with the mood of your text?

Assembling

- Affix the photos for your montage to the back of the postcard.
- Write out the polished postcard text on the postcard, or print typed text and glue.
- Write the postcard recipient's name and address.

Presenting

- As time allows, volunteers read their finished postcards to the class, and pass around their photomontages.

Mailing

- Add the recipient's address.
- Add a postcard stamp.
- Send!