

## Vocabulary & Story Writing

By Karen Cook

Background: from Effective teaching

### **RAFT: Role/Audience/Format/Topic**

#### **What is it?**

The RAFT strategy (Santa, 1988) employs writing-to-learn activities to enhance understanding of informational text. Instead of writing a traditional essay explaining a concept learner, students demonstrate their understanding in a nontraditional format. This technique encourages creative thinking and motivates students to reflect in unusual ways about concepts they have read. RAFT is an acronym that stands for:

- Role of the writer: What is the writer's role: reporter, observer, eyewitness, object, number, etc.?
- Audience: Who will be reading the writing: the teacher, other students, a parent, editor, people in the community, etc.?
- Format: What is the best way to present this writing: in a letter, an article, a report, a poem, an advertisement, e-mail, etc.?
- Topic: Who or what is the subject of this writing: a famous scientist, a prehistoric cave dweller, a character from literature, a chemical element or physical object, etc.?

The RAFT strategy forces students to process information, rather than merely write out answers to questions. Students are more motivated to undertake the writing assignment because it addresses various learning styles.

#### **How could it be used in instruction?**

This writing-to-learn strategy engages students in explaining what they know about a topic and elaborating on the topic in a fun way.

#### **How to use it:**

1. Think about the concepts or process that you want students to learn as they read a selected passage. Consider how writing in a fun way may enhance students' understanding of the topic.
2. Brainstorm possible roles students could assume in their writing.
3. Decide who the audience would be as well as the format for writing.
4. After students have finished reading, identify the role, audience, format and topic (RAFT) for the writing. Assign the same role for all students, or let them choose from several different roles.

### RAFT Examples for Science

<b>Role</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Water drop	Other water drops	Travel guide	Journey through water cycle
Bean	Self	Diary	Process of germination
Frog	Tadpole	Letter	Life cycle
Electron	Fourth grade students	Letter	Journey through a parallel circuit
Limestone rock	Cave visitors	Postcard	Chemical weathering process
Statue	Dear Abby readers	Advice column	Effect of acid rain
Trout	Farmers	Letter	Effects of fertilizer runoff
Duck	U.S. Senator	Letter	Effects of oil spill
Star	Self	Diary	Life cycle
Peregrine falcon	Public	News column	Effects of DDT
Red blood cell	Lungs	Thank-you note	Journey through circulatory system
Liver	Alcohol	Complaint	Effects of drinking
Lungs	Brain	Thank-you note	Quitting smoking
Rusty old car	Previous owner	Letter	Chemical change

Examples above from Effective Teaching Website.

I think some of the formats could make nice application assignments.

## Vocabulary & Writing Stories

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In my opinion, I think that R.A.F.T. works well for many lessons. I like to have students select 20 terms from a particular unit, define them, complete a prewriting chart & write a creative story in a R.A.F.T. format. I have assigned topics for the reproduction unit: To write your life story from “Zygote to Birth” in 200 words or less by utilizing 20 terms from the unit.

Students select 20 terms from the reproduction unit and make a 4 column chart as a pre-writing tool. The chart’s first column is for the term, the second is for the definition, the third for an example & the 4<sup>th</sup> a small sketch or digital thumbnail.

My second lesson example comes for another unit; ecology. It engages students about writing about ecology topics. Clip board with a 4 column chart & pencils are handy materials. Using the chart, students select 20 terms from ecology unit and define them. We take the field guides & clip board with charts outside on a nature walk around the school grounds. Students look for examples of natural items, identify them and put the item name in column 3 next to a term that applies. For example red clover might be next to autotrophs or producer or legume. The student lastly chooses an audience, frame and writes a story. They make a brief sketch or later include a digital picture. Lastly they are ready to write a R.A.F. T. using 20 terms in context to tell their story.

Pre-writing chart is on the next page...

