

Web Unit Plan

Title: Monster Swap

Description: Primary students give their imaginations a workout by creating unique monsters. They then hone their writing skills by writing descriptions for cyber pals who will try to re-create the students' terrible beasts!

At a Glance

Grade Level: 1–3

Subject sort (for Web site index): Language Arts

Subject(s): Language Arts, Social Studies

Topics: Descriptive Writing

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Elaboration, Analysis

Key Learnings: Writing for a Purpose, Imagery through Writing, Cultural and Geographic Awareness

Time Needed: 3 weeks, 2–3 periods weekly

Background: [Odyssey Story](#) from Vermont, United States

Unit Summary

Elementary students create monsters no one has ever seen before. After students draw their monsters, they write descriptive paragraphs about their creations. The descriptive paragraphs are swapped with a partner class through e-mail, and cyber pals try to duplicate the monsters, basing their interpretations on the written descriptions. Resulting illustrations are scanned and swapped, and kids get to see how powerful language can be. Along the way, students learn descriptive writing skills and find common ground in the universal appeal of ugly monsters.

Curriculum-Framing Questions

- **Essential Question**
How can I communicate so others will understand?
- **Unit Questions**
How can words be used to paint a picture?
How do we interpret things differently?
Why don't you see it the way I see it?
- **Content Questions**
What is an adjective?
What descriptive words does the author use to help you picture the character?
What should be included in a descriptive paragraph?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered [assessments](#) are used in the Monster Swap Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, and products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Prior to Instruction

Locate a class to partner up with at [ePALS](#)*, post this project at the [Global Schoolhouse Project Registry](#)*, or sign up at [monsterexchange.org](#). Arrange to have buddies (either parents or upper-grade students) scan drawings.

Looking at How Words Can Paint a Picture

Read *The Judge*, by Harvey Zemach. Before reaching the last page, have students draw a picture of "the horrible creature coming this way." Post the illustrations around the room and compare them. Pose the following Unit and Content Questions:

- *How can words be used to paint a picture?*
- *How do we interpret things differently?*
- *Why don't you see it the way I see it?*
- *What descriptive words does the author use to help you picture the character?*

Discuss the word choices the author made to help the reader see a picture of the creature in the reader's mind. Ask students to consider why the class had so many different interpretations of the horrible creature.

Before teaching about descriptive writing, tell students you have drawn a monster and will show it to them after you describe it. Read from strips of paper that have both helpful descriptive phrases and more narrative phrases. Ask students which phrases help them to "see" your monster in their mind's eye (for example, "My monster likes to read books." versus "My monster has three orange eyes shaped like cat's eyes."). Sort the phrases, then post the descriptive ones and let kids try to draw your monster. Make sure the description is very simple so students are successful. Have an art show, and discuss how interpretations differ.

Working with Adjectives

Introduce the term and definition of the word *adjective*. Then show pictures of Max's friends in Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are*. Ask students to come up with as many adjectives as possible to describe the monsters in Sendak's illustrations. Record student responses. Afterwards, post the list of adjectives and encourage students to continue to add new words as the unit progresses.

Read descriptive excerpts from William Steig's book *Shrek* to further answer the Unit Question, *How can words be used to paint a picture?* Substitute the character's name until the end of the activity, and ask students to imagine the creature they hear about.

Finally, reveal the character's name and talk about how it was interpreted differently in the movie and in their minds. Identify *vibrant words* (words that evoke strong visual imagery, and words that are accurate and precise) in the book and list them on a poster board. Discuss how comparison can help describe (such as, "Its single foot is like an elephant's.").

Creating Original Monsters

Challenge students to draw a monster one no one has ever seen before using common art materials or online applications, such as [tuxpaint.org](#) or Encourage them to make their drawings fill the page or screen, with most detail going into the monsters, not the surroundings. Give a lot of time for pencil sketching and discussion, and, if necessary, have students trace their final pencil drawings in black felt pen and color it with crayons or felt markers.

Using Words to Paint a Picture

Tell students that they will be writing a descriptive paragraph of their own to send to

their cyber pals. Students use words to paint pictures of their monsters in the minds of their readers. Encourage precise word choice. Review what a descriptive paragraph should include. Circulate through the room as students work, asking questions and taking anecdotal notes. Include additional lessons if students need more help in using descriptive words effectively. Schedule conferences to assess student progress and provide additional help as needed.

After students complete their first drafts, ask them to exchange their writing with a partner. Have each pair review each others' paragraph and circle the words that help them "see" the monster. Ask the partners in each pair to provide feedback to each other about using more or different vibrant words, or using comparisons more effectively. Give students time to edit for final draft and then publish their final copies. Have students exchange their [final copies](#) with their cyber pals.

Interpreting the Words of Others

When students receive their ePALS partners' descriptive essays, have students draw the monsters from the descriptions. Photocopy a set of these pictures to keep, and then send your students' drawings to the partner class. The partner class should do the same.

Wrapping Up

Each student should end up with three products—their own drawing, their piece of descriptive writing, and their cyber pal's drawing based on the writing. Revisit the following Unit Questions:

- *How can words be used to paint a picture?*
- *How do we interpret things differently?*
- *Why don't you see it the way I see it?*

Hold a class debriefing session to summarize learning and draw final conclusions about the power of language, and answer the Essential Question, *How can I communicate so others will understand?*

For older students, pass out the [student rubric](#) and ask them to use it as a guide when they create a [multimedia slideshow or Web site](#). For younger students, consider scanning the pairs of monster pictures for use in a class multimedia slideshow. Students could read their descriptions into an audio track to accompany the drawings. Present the slideshow at a community gathering or in conjunction with a monster celebration.

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student

- Make modifications as dictated in the student's IEP
- Use cooperative grouping
- Present written and oral instructions in a variety of ways
- Allow extra time for completing assignments
- Work with a parent or teacher's aide for assistance
- Use checkpoints and positive reinforcement throughout the duration of the unit

Gifted Student

- Provide more advanced instruction as warranted, possibly delve into figurative language (such as simile and metaphor)
- Have the student become an expert about the ePALS partner's state or country

English Language Learner

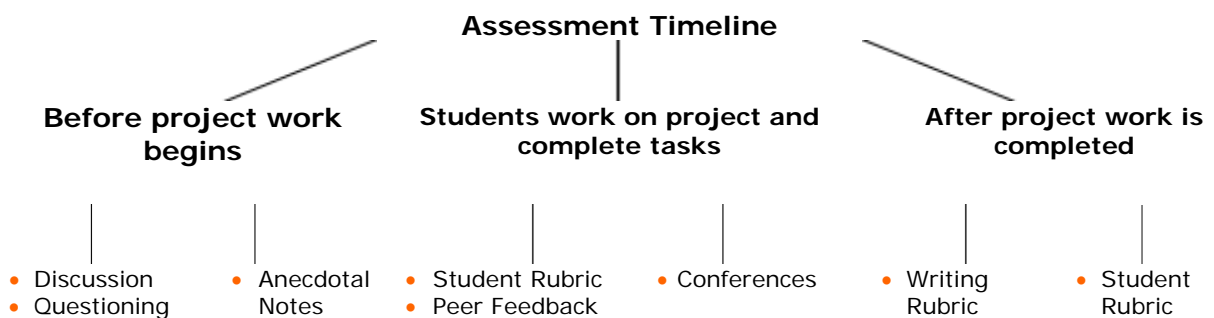
- Encourage support from a student who is more proficient in English
- Provide extra time for completing assignments
- Enlist the help of a parent or teacher's aide
- Create templates or graphic organizers for the student to fill in
- Provide visuals, manipulatives, and illustrated text

Credits

A teacher participated in the Intel® Teach Program, which resulted in this idea for a classroom project. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here. This classroom project was featured in *An Innovation Odyssey*, a collection of stories of technology in the classroom, Story 119: [Monster Swap](#).

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

Assessment Plan



Use questioning and anecdotal notes to monitor student progress, provide feedback, and adjust instruction. Schedule conferences to assess individual progress and provide students with the time to ask questions and clarify information. Provide opportunities for peer feedback during the writing process, and informally assess students' abilities to both give and receive feedback effectively. Distribute the [student rubric](#) to help guide students during their work on the presentation. Ask students to self-assess their work using the same [student rubric](#). Use the [writing rubric](#) to assess progress in descriptive writing.

As a final assessment, show students a picture of an animal, monster, or other interesting subject. Have them write a descriptive paragraph, and assess writing ability using the [writing rubric](#).

Targeted Content Standards and Benchmarks

National Content Standards English

- Communication Skills: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Communication Strategies: Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Applying Language Skills: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (such as for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Student Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Use imagination to create an original monster.
- Use writing traits (specifically word choice, ideas and content, and sentence fluency).
- Distinguish between narration and description.
- Write a descriptive paragraph.
- Use the Internet to communicate.
- Assess writing for mechanics of spelling and punctuation.

Resources

Materials and Resources

Printed Materials

- Sendak, M. (1963). *Where the wild things are*. New York: HarperCollins Juvenile Books.
- Steig, W. (1990). *Shrek*. New York: Sunburst Paperbacks.
- Zemach, H. (1988). *The judge*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux.

Internet Resources

- The Global Schoolhouse
www.gsh.org/lists/hilites.html*
The original online learning projects announcements list
- ePALS
www.epals.com*
Online international classroom exchange

Technology—Hardware

- Camera to take pictures of monster drawings
- Computer(s) for word processing and sending messages to ePALS partners
- Digital camera to take pictures of monster drawings
- Internet connection to communicate with ePALS partners
- Printer to print monster drawings
- Scanner to scan drawings

Technology—Software

- E-mail software to converse with ePALS
- Image processing to work with pictures
- Multimedia (optional) to create a class slideshow
- Word processing to write descriptive paragraphs