Critical Essay
Heart of Darkness

Context: This assignment would be assigned after the class has finished reading Heart of Darkness. They have just finished reading the book, so this is basically a capstone to the reading unit.

Purpose: This strategy is to
1. help students make connections between texts.
2. help students argue points: help them learn to support their arguments with details.
3. help students see that there are other sides to different arguments.
4. help them come up with their own opinions.
5. improve their writing skills.

Audience: The teacher and class members. The author is to imagine they are writing a scholarly paper. They want their opinions taken seriously, so they will make sure that they use the best grammar they can, and that they use vocabulary properly, etc.

Steps to completion:
2. Think about it. Are Chinua Achebe’s statements accurate? Support your opinion by giving examples from both texts. Acknowledge both sides to the question.
3. Outline or create some graphical presentation of your response to the question. They may want to write a statement of Chinua Achebe’s, and then write how that statement may be correct, and then write how that statement could be wrong. Or they may prefer to outline.
4. Write their rough draft.
5. Bring it to class the next day, peers look at it. Make suggestions about how it could be improved, etc. Grade it according to rubric informally—let the student know how they are doing on it.
6. Write the final draft.
7. Turn in.

(Give students a copy of the Rubric as well as the assignment sheet following. Also, make sure they get a copy of Chinua Achebe’s paper.)

Smith, BYU, 2008
Rubric

Heart of Darkness

To receive full points in each category, writers/papers should:

____/12 pts Ideas and Content
  o Have clear **relevant** details relating to the thesis of the paper. The details should tie in to the thesis.
  o Include both sides of the argument: Chinua Achebe’s statement about _____ may be correct because….it also may be incorrect because….
  o Take a stand. Chinua Achebe is correct or Chinua Achebe is incorrect.

____/10 pts Organization
  o Create logical organization.
  o Have no obvious gaps where information seems to be missing.

____/8 pts Voice
  o Make sure the paper is unique.
  o Sounds like you.
  o Sounds convincing, not “fake.”

____/8 pts word choice
  o Use words they know well and love.
  o Make sure their words are understandable to the reader. (don’t use slang, etc.)
  o Natural language, not overdone, or flowery.
  o Use good descriptive words, strong action words, and specific nouns when appropriate.
  o Use similes and metaphors when appropriate.

____/12 pts Sentence Fluency
  o Smooth transitions.
  o Sentences are complete and make sense.
  o Any fragments are intentional and add to the message of the paper.

____/10 pts Mechanics
  o No or few spelling errors.
  o Capitalization used correctly.
  o Grammar used correctly.
  o Punctuation used correctly.
  o Paragraphs are used effectively.

_______/60 pts

Smith, BYU, 2008
Critical Essay
Heart of Darkness


Imagine you are writing a paper which will be published in a newspaper or journal. Because of this, you will want this to be your best work.

Prompt:

Are Chinua Achebe’s statements accurate? Support your opinion by giving examples from both texts. Acknowledge both sides to the question.

STEP 1: Before you actually write it, create a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram of what you want to say. Next, translate your ideas into an outline of what you want to say. This will help make sure you don’t forget anything vital. You may want to write a statement of Chinua Achebe’s, and then write how that statement may be correct, and then write how that statement could be wrong.

STEP 2: Write your rough draft. Keep the rubric in mind as you write and look it over.

STEP 3: Peer review. We will be peer reviewing in class, so make sure you are prepared next time with your first draft.

STEP 4: Final Draft. Write your final draft, and turn it in.

Due Date:____________________