Assessment Strategy: “Prescription” for Phineas Gage

Context
This assessment strategy is to be used at the end of the Phineas Gage unit. The big question for the unit was “how do you get through hard times?” At this point, students have read about how Phineas handled his accident. At the end of the book, Fleischman talks about Phineas’s journey:

“Phineas Gage was lucky. His accident was terrible. It changed him into someone else, and yet Phineas figured out how to live as that new person for eleven years. He was limited in ways that are important to all human beings, but he found a way to live, working with horses. He took care of himself. He saw the world. He died with his family around him, the only people who knew both the old and new Phineas. And he drove a six-horse stagecoach. I bet Phineas Gage drove fast” (page 75).

To connect Phineas’s experience to the big question, students will pretend they are Dr. Harlow and write Phineas a letter of advice.

Statement of Purpose
This after-reading strategy is a way to assess students’ learning throughout the unit, from basic facts to reading comprehension and critical thinking. It will help students synthesize the reading (what they have learned about Phineas Gage and his journey) with the unit’s big question (how do you get through hard times?). This assessment strategy corresponds with the following Common Core Anchor Standards:

• Writing 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
• Writing 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
• Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
• Writing 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
• Writing 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
• Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
• Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it, cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
• Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
• Reading 3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Directions

Main Idea: Students have finished reading Phineas Gage. The big question for the unit is “how do you get through hard times?” Students will combine their knowledge about Phineas and their ideas for getting through hard times into a letter, writing a “prescription” from the viewpoint of Dr. Harlow.

Materials needed:
• Copies of Phineas Gage
• Paper and pencils/pens
• Writing prompt (handouts or overhead)
• Whiteboard and whiteboard marker
• Journals
• Graphic organizer T-chart

Time: Entire class period

Steps for Completion:

1. Journal write: What hard times did Phineas go through? How did his brain injury affect the rest of his life? Discuss answers as a class and list on whiteboard. (10 minutes)

2. Ask students how Phineas learned to deal with the hard things listed on the board. Have students pair-share (5–10 minutes)

3. Introduce writing prompt (see “Prescription” for Phineas Gage prompt). Model some ideas for students. (5–10 minutes)

4. Give students time to write in class. Students can finish assignment at home if they don’t have enough time. (rest of class)

Assessment

This essay is the final, summative assessment for the unit. It incorporates reading comprehension (knowing about Phineas's situation and the struggles he will go through,
who Dr. Harlow is, etc.) and personal application to the main idea (how do you get through hard times?).
“Prescription” for Phineas Gage

You are Dr. Harlow and Phineas has just been injured by the tamping iron. You have had a dream where you see Phineas’s future.

Write a “prescription” or a doctor’s letter to Phineas, giving him advice on how to deal with the hard times ahead. Do not prescribe actual medicine or advice like “lay down a lot.” Instead, give him advice on how to be happy even though his personality is changed.

Try to combine what you know about Phineas’s story with your answers to the question “How do you get through hard times?”

Use the T-chart to get your thoughts ready. Then, use your T-chart to help you write your letter. List at least three problems with their solutions.

Your letter should be at least one page. Use your best spelling and grammar.

Suggested Format

Introduction
  • Friendly and sympathetic
  • Give a preview for what you are going to tell him about
Paragraph
  • 1st problem he will face
  • Suggestions you have to fix it
Paragraph
  • 2nd problem he will face
  • Suggestions you have to fix it
Paragraph
  • 3rd problem he will face
  • Suggestions you have to fix it
Conclusion
  • Be positive and wish him luck

McBride, BYU, 2012
## Phineas Gage T-Chart

Fill out the T-chart to organize your thoughts before you write your letter. You can use the book and the ideas on the board to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard times in Phineas’s life</th>
<th>Your “prescription” or advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No longer likes people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(page 20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>