The Greatest Generation
Random House Trade Paperback, 2005
During reading activity: making connections with a double-entry journal

Context: This instructional routine allows students to stay engaged with the film clips and to make them relevant to the text we are reading. This week’s topic is heroes, so as we examine the characteristics of heroes in relevant texts, we want the students to make connections to the two vignettes about heroes that they have read for homework. This instructional technique is appropriate for this purpose because if they just watched the clips without having to make any connections on paper, they would find it much more difficult to come up with connections after the fact.

Statement of purpose:
The double-entry journal allows students to record things they observe about heroes and attributes of heroes in one column and then, as the class discusses the two vignettes, they can make connections to the reading. It takes relevant texts and makes connections to this text that they have fewer natural connections to.

Directions:

Main idea: This week we are talking about heroes and making connections between heroes and the greatest generation. The core values of heroes tend to remain consistent but the manifestations can differ. The idea is for the students to look at characters they recognize as heroic and then compare their values and actions to those of the greatest generation.

Materials needed: Double-entry journal handout; film clips from Iron Man, Spiderman and Batman.
Duration: 30 minutes.

1. Distribute the double-entry journal handout. Instruct students to listen to each speech in each of the film clips and document what they feel are heroic characteristics based on our discussion from the previous day (war posters).
2. Show each clip.
3. Have the students pair up and discuss what they found in each clip.
4. Have the students work in those same pairs to make connections to the readings from the week (and week’s previous as well). Are any of the characteristics of the heroes from the movies the same as the ones from the greatest generation? Are they different?

Assessment:
Have each pairing share with the class what connections they made. Have them be prepared to justify their statements. Do they understand what makes a hero? Do they understand the difference between core values and actions (abstract v. concrete)?
Context:
This strategy is intended to get each student involved in the class discussion. This strategy comes at the end of the week on heroes so it’s a great way to sum up what we’ve talked about all week long and to check to make sure students have grasped the concept of what makes a hero and what it has looked like throughout the generations.

Statement of Purpose:
So often class discussions are dominated by a few confident, outspoken students. Participation in discussion is one way for students to synthesize information and fishbowl allows you as a teacher to require each student to get involved in a discussion at least twice. It also helps students learn how to articulate their ideas in a group setting.

Directions:
Main Idea: Since this is the end of the week, we want to make sure the students have an opportunity to synthesize all they have learned about heroes and how that relates to greatness and perspective.

Materials needed: Pictures of subjects of the week’s vignettes; markers; paper.
Duration: Length of the class period.

Step 1: Post pictures around the room of the people you’ve read about up to this point. Students will start off by writing one word around the picture that they associate with each person (intended to jog their memory about that specific person as well as activate some of the heroic themes).

Step 2: Have the students arrange their chairs in a circle, placing four of them in a smaller circle inside the bigger circle.

Step 3: Explain to the students the rules of the discussion: you may only speak if you are in the smaller circle of four chairs; you get in the circle by tapping someone out; you can only tap someone out if they have made a substantial comment; you must appear in the circle two separate times during the discussion in order to get credit for being there that day; the students run the entire discussion without interference from the teacher.

Step 4: Give the students the prompt: Compare and contrast the perspectives of the anecdotes studied that week and how greatness is portrayed in each.

Assessment: After the discussion, have students write a short reflection on what they learned, how hearing others’ perspectives helped them understand, etc.
Context: This is a unit wrap-up activity, intended to help students synthesize the theme of the unit as a whole. The journal activity is intended to activate the students’ thinking before the silent discussion activity (on a daily level) and their final project (on a unit level).

Statement of Purpose: Journaling helps students construct meaning on their own. This meaning can either be left in the journal or can be used later in class discussion or in a more polished product. The idea behind journaling is for students to see what they are thinking in order to make sense of all of the information floating around in their heads. Once they see what they are thinking, they are able to start making more sophisticated connections, both in further writing as well as in discussion.

Directions:
Main idea: The hope is that by the end of this unit, students will have a better idea of what greatness really is. They have studied the definition of hero, seen the contributions of women, seen the prejudices some have had to overcome, and analyzed the love and commitment of this generation. This activity gives students an opportunity to look at all of those things together and come up with a definition of greatness and analyze how their definition has changed over the course of the unit.

Materials needed: journal.
Duration: 15 minutes

Step 1: Give students the journal prompt: “How has your definition of greatness changed over the course of the unit (refer back to your first journal entry on greatness)? Use specific examples to back up your new definition.”

Step 2: Have students write for 15 minutes, encouraging them to write the entire time. Have them spend the first five minutes making lists, webs, or other very informal writing at first. Then have them move into articulating their position.

Assessment: Choose various students to share their findings.
Context: This is another unit wrap-up activity. This activity focuses on evaluating and analyzing Brokaw’s narrative technique through drawing the various steps of his narrative arc. This activity is in preparation for students writing their own narrative about someone who exemplifies their definition of greatness.

Statement of Purpose: In order to write a good narrative, students must understand how narrative arcs work and how to deliberately shape a story, both on the micro and macro level. This activity allows students to see visually how the storyline works on both levels.

Directions:
Main idea: Brokaw intentionally shapes each individual vignette, each section, and the book as a whole. What intentional moves does he make that makes this book successful? Are there any weak places? How can you employ these techniques in your own writing?

Materials needed: 2-3 long pieces of butcher paper; photographs of people depicted in vignettes; markers/crayons.
Duration: 45 minutes

Step 1: Divide students into groups and assign each group a different vignette.
Step 2: Using one vignette as an example, review the narrative concepts of rise/fall, climax, etc. Show the students how Brokaw employs these techniques in his vignettes.
Step 3: Have the class analyze another vignette together. See how the two relate to each other. Does Brokaw use the same techniques? How does he switch things up?
Step 4: Have students analyze the structure of their assigned vignette. Have them pictorially depict the narrative elements on their assigned section of the butcher paper. The butcher paper should be divided up by vignette in the order they appear in the book. Students can draw and label the events any way they wish, just so that their depiction demonstrates their awareness of the structure.
Step 5: Quickly review each vignette and the structure. Look at similarities and differences and discuss what the similarity/variety does for the engagement level of the book. Then switch from the micro level to the macro level. How does Brokaw use those same elements on a larger scale? Does it work?

Assessment: Pictorial depiction of the narrative structure.