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# Modifying Curriculum For Enriched And Gifted Students

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MODIFYING CURRICULUM FOR  
ENRICHED AND GIFTED STUDENTS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

In this chapter I'll explain the rationale that brought me to my "burning question," "*How can I take an English curriculum and enrich it to better challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students?*"

This is a question that I've chosen to answer in these pages because as gifted students are being recognized and identified more and more, curricula need to be in place to challenge them appropriately. Putting effort into an English curriculum is crucial because English is not a subject like math or science where challenging students *can* simply mean working through the chapters faster. A gifted English class should provide students the opportunity to explore literature beyond the typical elements of fiction, non-fiction and the like. It should challenge students' views on our language and how it can be used to express ideas. And foremost, it should provide a chance for students to support, challenge, and respect each others' expressed perspectives.

So, how does a teacher, with these lofty goals in mind, go about creating an English curriculum to challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> graders? Does one start from scratch? There's really no need to do that anymore as many gifted-specific curricula have been created in the past ten years. But what if a district, like many now-a-days, doesn't have the money for one of these curriculum packages? Typically, districts start with the standard curriculum and strive to adapt it and make it more challenging.

What I've chosen to do for the sake of this paper is to adapt my school's basic English curriculum, with input from articles, to meet the varying needs of my enriched students. This, I believe, will provide a concrete structure for an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Enriched English class.

How did I arrive at creating a curriculum for gifted students? How did I get here? It started with my younger brothers who were my inspiration. I wasn't a gifted student. In fact, I didn't even graduate from high school with honors. The thing that I realize now, that I had no one to push me. I was a student who fell between the cracks. Growing up as one of three kids in a single-parent house, school sometimes wasn't highest on the priority list. While my mother was working one of two or three jobs after school, it was my job to watch the two siblings I had. Dinner, baths, most of it fell on me. There wasn't much time for me to do homework, nor was there much time for my mother to push me. I did do well enough to get into college, and there I made the most of what college had to offer. I had to work very hard because I wasn't used to being pushed by my instructors, or myself. But I did well.

My younger brothers, on the other hand, the ones serving as my motivation, did have that push. They are actually half-brothers; we share the same dad, but had different mothers. Our dad was very intelligent, and my step-mother may be even more so. Therefore, these younger brothers had the motivation and inspiration to do well.

I remember vividly how the older of the two struggled in elementary school. I was 13 when he was born, so I saw him grow up. I knew he was smart; even dangerously so. Why was he struggling in school? What I know now is that he was actually bored in class and didn't know how to express it. For instance, the older of the two, after high school, decided to take the MENSA entrance exam, "Just to see what it's like." He passed on his first try. He's *that* kind of smart.

As it happened, he was still quite young when I was in college learning to be a teacher. My dad asked why I thought Evan, someone obviously intelligent, quizzical, and whom anyone could see was intelligent as can be, could be struggling so much? I suggested that maybe he was bored. So my dad asked him, and that turned out to be the case. Once Evan got a teacher that understood his situation and was willing to work with him, he flourished. His struggles and boredom greatly diminished and so did his behavior problems.

I, in the meantime, got a teaching job working with the opposite end of the spectrum: the worst of the worst. When I was hired, I was told they were looking for a teacher who wouldn't freak out when told to, "...go to hell." I loved it! The progress that I could see after just a semester of working with these students instead of against them was remarkable. It was so gratifying, incredibly frustrating at times, but gratifying. The smart kids weren't even on my radar; they could take care of themselves, right? No one worried about them. *"They'd be fine."*

Yet more and more in the last decade there has been a drastic decline in services provided to gifted students because of a huge upsurge in providing for lower-ability ones. Most standards today, especially those that started with No Child Left Behind, are minimum standards. Most of the focus is at the bottom; trying to get kids who are low, up to a minimum standard. The kids who meet the standards, aren't an issue of concern, especially when populations of low-performing students could have gotten schools put on the Adequate Yearly Progress, (or "AYP") list. While NCLB and AYP have since disappeared, the mindset of focusing on the bottom hasn't. The problem inherent in a bottom-up philosophy is that we don't often pay attention to the needs of the students at the top. In fact, we're just recognizing that they have needs of their own.

I've been teaching mostly eighth grade English for 21 years, with students from the lowest to the highest. I've always been someone who roots for the underdogs and until recently, I didn't see that the kids at the top are often being neglected.

I chose to write this paper as a curriculum capstone because I want to create something meaningful, and ultimately usable. When I was approached several years ago to teach the Enriched English class in our school, no "enriched" curriculum existed. Now, several years later, we've adopted a curriculum that makes some provisions for enrichment. This has been helpful, but until recently, teachers of enriched classes have had to modify the standard curriculum on their own.

Thus, "*How can I enrich an English curriculum to challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students?*" is not just a question I hope to explore, but perhaps begin to answer. Also, I'll look at what the current literature says, and what other educators have put into action. Basically, I'm hoping to create something for others that I wish I'd had when I started. It is true that there are many enrichment curricula that districts can buy and implement. Those can work well but for every school that is doing well with high-potential students, there are other schools that are not. Again, this work is intended to be a starting point for teachers who have been asked by administration to "enrich" the curriculum, or as often happens, have recognized on their own, that this is something the students need.

In the next several chapters I plan to explore what "gifted" means. Defining the term has many inherent issues and difficulties. I will also share some of my own struggles to identify gifted students, their academic and emotional needs, and ways to enrich a standard curriculum

for gifted students. Finally I will touch on what school programs aimed toward gifted students can offer to provide the most opportunity for these students to be successful.

## **Chapter Two**

In this chapter I will give a brief history of giftedness in education, and then explore how giftedness has been defined by researchers. I will attempt to illustrate the inherent difficulties in identifying such students. Current research contains no consensus on who should be served or how. I will discuss options and tools for identifying gifted students as well as some of their academic and affective needs.

### **History and Definition**

Although people with exceptional abilities have been heralded throughout history, the use of the word “gifted” in an educational sense is relatively new. It wasn’t until the 1800’s that the superintendent of schools in St. Louis, Missouri, discussed a plan for gifted children to accelerate their classes so they wouldn’t fall victim to “laziness” (National Association of Gifted Children.org, 2012)

By the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, G.M. Whipple and T.S. Henry started using the term “gifted” to describe students who were able to work through the curriculum faster than other students. Then, in 1921, Lewis Terman began his famous study of genius. He believed that nurturing academically exceptional children was essential for our country’s future. He used the term “genius” in the title of his study, “The Genetic Studies of Genius,” but later referred to the subjects in his study as “gifted,” which established that label in our educational vocabulary (nagc.org).

Defining the term “gifted” can be challenging. In fact, most studies suggest that it is a combination of factors, intelligence and creativity being the most common. All definitions agree that to be considered gifted, an individual must possess a particular kind of ability and a high level of expertise (Dalzell, 1997). But that is where the similarities in most definitions end.

In her 1997 article, “Giftedness: Infancy to adolescence- A developmental perspective,” Heidi J. Dalzell cites Gowan and Demos (1978) who say that intellectual ability alone is insufficient to define giftedness. Creativity is the key measure. She also cites Winner (1996) who separates the concepts of giftedness into domain-specific ability and talent, such as musical or artistic. This last idea, the one Winner offers, seems to have struck a chord with many studying gifted education. They support the idea that “intelligence” has different aspects. One study done by Yale, discovered that when a wider range of abilities was tested including analytical, creative, and practical intelligences- a much larger group of students than were identified by tests, qualified as “gifted” (Sternberg, 1997).

The terms *gifted* and *talented* are often used together to describe a wide range of natural talents. For children to be identified as gifted and talented, they need to demonstrate outstanding *potential* or promise, rather than mature, expert performance (Guthrie, James, 2003). The term *gifted* in an educational context, however, is descriptive rather than explanatory. Though efforts have been made to differentiate the two terms, with “giftedness” referring to natural abilities, and “talented” referring to systematically developed abilities, such differentiation is difficult, if not impossible. In practice, no reliable measures exist to tease apart these constitutional and acquired parts of individual differences in human abilities (Guthrie, James, 2003).



Also though outside the scope of this paper, the label of “giftedness” may also depend on what an individual’s culture deems valuable. Many advocates, Donna Ford being one of the most prominent among them, suggested in 2006 that especially for Native Americans and African Americans, many more students would qualify as “gifted” if what their cultures valued were a part of gifted assessment.

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) , although interpretations of the word “gifted” seem limitless, there is a handful of foundational definitions from a *conservative* definition (demonstrating a high IQ and scoring high on tests) to a *liberal* one (a broadened concept that includes multiple criteria that might not be measured through an IQ test such as ability in music, art or performance). Some of the more common or popular definitions come from the National Association for Gifted Children, including the Javits Act (1988), which provides grant money for education programs serving bright children from low-income families, and from the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. From the field of research itself, definitions come from the Columbus Group, F. Gagne, and Joseph Renzulli, at the University of Connecticut, one of the foremost authorities on gifted education.

## **Identification**

The identification process for placing students in gifted programs can be difficult. Consider this: if a common definition of “gifted” can’t be agreed upon, how can we decide who does or does not qualify for that title? Since definitions can include such a wide spectrum of abilities, identifying which students qualify as gifted can seem next to impossible.

For instance Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences directly challenges a unitary, and therefore, conservative, definition of intelligence, and thereby giftedness. Gardner felt that gifts are "domain-specific." He took direct issue with gifted programs which included students whose IQ was over 130, but would not include a student whose IQ was 129. He noted that many of the tests used to measure IQ are associated with logical-mathematical and linguistic skills, skills highly regarded in schools (Gardner, 1987). Until our beliefs about identification broaden, little progress can be made in developing a better system that resolves some of the issues Gardner raises. Our task is to identify not only the truly gifted, but also to locate students who demonstrate undeveloped potential intellectually and in specific areas, including academic, artistic, and leadership domains (VanTassel-Baska, 2000).

There are ways to identify students as gifted that incorporate these ideas. Many schools that provide gifted or enriched programs are now taking this wide range into account. For example, the Minnesota middle school in which I teach does include an IQ test as part of its gifted assessment, but also includes other scores such as the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment III (MCAIII), a writing sample in addition to an application filled out and submitted by the student. We also use the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), which measures reasoning skills as opposed to math or reading, and the Stanford-Binet 5, which is "normed" for gifted students. In their 1997 article, "Don't throw away the old Binet", Dr. Linda Silverman and Kathi Kearney- argue that even though it's incredibly outdated by today's standards, not user-friendly, incredibly difficult to administer *and* score, it's the only test capable of identifying what they refer to as the "super-gifted," those with IQs four or more standard deviations above the average mean.

Silverman and Kearney explain that in constructing a cognitive abilities test, we are always faced with constraints. We have to produce an instrument that will adequately appraise a full range of individual differences in a chronological age group from the very slowest level of development to the most rapid. At the same time, we have to produce an instrument that can be administered fairly easily and within a reasonable amount of time. The compromise is to produce an instrument that is most effective in the range of .4 standard deviations; therefore, we can't use tasks that are successfully completed by 99.99 percent of an age group or that are failed by 99.99 percent of an age group. In the Binet, Revision IV, some nonverbal items could only be solved by children in classes for the gifted. You can't put items like that in an intelligence test because they aren't functional for a wide enough group (Silverman & Kearney, 1997).

This helps to explain why newer tests, like the Stanford-Binet Fifth Edition, released in 2003 or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fifth Edition (WISC-V) released in 2014, are inadequate for highly gifted children. When an item can be solved only by children enrolled in a gifted class, it is removed from the test. Differentiating exceptionally from moderately gifted children was never a goal of current test makers (Silverman & Kearney, 1997). Regardless of which test(s) a program uses, it is widely accepted that using more than one assessment creates a more defensible identification process and leads to well-rounded group of candidates for a program.

Another way to identify gifted students is teacher input. For different reasons, this can be just as complicated a process as deciding which tests to administer. Though I firmly believe that teachers are just as in tune with their students (especially at the elementary level) as most people in their lives, many are not trained in identifying gifted intelligence. For example, some students

just “play school” well. They do their homework; they learn their facts; they are friendly, social, don’t cause trouble; they’re “good” kids. This can easily be misdiagnosed as gifted. Conversely, a student who is genuinely gifted can display a variety of behaviors that teachers without training in gifted education would never associate with giftedness. Undoubtedly, gifted children can be paradoxical. A student’s teachers can be mystified by the fact that as a first-grader, a student is able to read at a fifth grade level, has conquered fourth grade math, and enjoys discussing the underlying themes of a fairy tale with great intensity, creating meaningful connections with modern life. Yet he seems unable to create order out of the chaos in his desk, and constantly loses his lunch money. He seldom bothers to complete drill-type homework, can’t seem to keep basic supplies handy, and does assignments in off-beat sorts of ways (Weber, 1999) .

Widely varying behaviors can cause teachers to concentrate more on the improvement of weak areas than on intellectual strengths they believe students will develop on their own (Weber, 1999). In Weber’s article, she elaborates on the work of Caine and Caine in 1997. Their research on Mental Models describes the assumptions, generalizations and images that not only influence how people understand the world, but also the actions they take based on that understanding (Weber, 1999). What they found in their research, conducted in three California schools, was that what a person says is not always what a person actually believes. Based on that premise, Weber speculates that mental models represent many classroom teachers’ resistance to early identification of young gifted children.

In other words, people do not always behave in accordance with their espoused models, but they always behave in accordance with their mental models (Argyris, in Senge, in Weber, 1999). Thus, educators may nod in agreement and give verbal acceptance to research that

validates the necessity of meeting the needs of gifted students, while deep within, they harbor a mental model that says “They’re too young, they’re too immature, and they’re not ready.” It is a human tendency to reduce new information to fit into one’s current mental model (Weber, 1999 p.6)

Another issue that makes identification very difficult is peer acceptance. Developmentally, at the age at which students enter middle school, acceptance by peers is extremely important. So much so that many gifted students feel they must forsake their academic abilities for the sake of fitting in socially.

Research suggests that this is especially the case for girls. During adolescence, pressure to conform to sex-role stereotypes increases. Peer relations and established values influence the expectations of gifted females. Status issues, fitting in, and popularity have been associated with female adolescents’ tendencies to hide their accomplishments and abilities. Also, society’s focus on physical attractiveness indicates to females that this, rather than academic ability, is the medium through which to gain approval (Dalzell, 1997). Recently, however, with the ever-increasing popularity of girl’s/women’s sports and other accomplishments, that confidence has entered into the classroom. It is now common for girls at the middle school level to be outperforming boys academically, and not be embarrassed to do so.

## **Needs**

The needs of gifted students are often as hard to pinpoint as the kids themselves. Because there is so much to discuss in the way of the needs of gifted students, I will touch briefly on two areas: academic needs and affective needs.

Generally speaking, there are two main strategies to serve gifted children: acceleration and enrichment. With accelerated curriculum, gifted children can learn at a pace that matches their learning ability. This allows them to progress to high-level materials much faster. The constant challenges not only suit these advanced learners, but also keeps them motivated (Guthrie, 2003).

Enrichment activities, on the other hand, provide gifted children with opportunities to explore topics and issues from the regular curriculum in greater breadth and depth, to engage in independent or collaborative inquiry that cultivates their problem-solving abilities and creativity, and inspires their desire for excellence (Guthrie, 2003).

There has been only a little research on how gifted students' learning styles differ from regular students', but in an interview with Eastern New Mexico University, Joe Renzulli (2000) "gifted students prefer less structured kinds of learning experiences – projects, independent investigations, simulations, and dramatizations". Renzulli cautions against over generalizing, however. Some highly gifted students prefer more structured activities such as lectures and computer-assisted instruction (Knobel, 2002). Renzulli says that we should expose students to varying styles of instruction so gifted students learn an appreciation for other styles (p.4).

To continue the theme of uncertainty, experts can't agree on the emotional and affective needs of gifted students. Researchers like Terman and Oden in the late 1950's indicated that there are positive emotional aspects to being intellectually gifted. More recently, Renzulli, Coleman, Cross and a whole host of others, stretching from 1971 to 1997 and beyond, suggest that gifted children as a group might, in fact, be at an increased risk for not developing some of

the social skills necessary to function socially and emotionally (Preuss, 2004). There may be some “vulnerabilities” that affect gifted children. A review of the literature suggests that gifted children are faced with daily multiple stressors specific to being gifted, such as pressure from others to be perfect, feeling different and misunderstood by their peers, and impatience with problems that lack an easy solution. Combine those with the daily stressors of childhood in general: such as arguing with parents or peers, getting bad grades, not making the team, etc, and we can appreciate that gifted youth may be at higher risk for psychosocial maladjustment (Preuss, 2004).

In summary, there is an obvious lack of absolutes when it comes to gifted education. Experts in the field have a very difficult time deciding what constitutes a gifted student. How many and what types of intelligences and abilities should be allowed in the definition can't be answered because with each inclusion, the pool changes drastically. Another inherent problem is that if we can't decide how to define giftedness, it makes it very difficult to identify those whom we, as educators, should serve.

Generally speaking, experts agree that students to be served by a gifted program should be identified before the program is created. There are several tests that can be used to identify gifted students, but using more than one assessment will help identify a well-rounded population of students. Although it would be easy to go by the numbers and create cut-off scores, it seems clear that we could do a great disservice to the very students we're trying to serve by being too arbitrary. It is important to recognize that gifted students have differing academic and affective needs. Again, since gifted students don't fit a mold, awareness of their needs by their teachers can help to ensure that they will develop to their fullest.

### Chapter Three

In this chapter I will describe the district for which I have adopted an English curriculum and how students have been identified as gifted. I will then demonstrate how a lesson from a unit of the regular curriculum can be modified and supplemented for an Enriched English class. Finally, I'll present two, eighth-grade English lessons in detail that have been adapted for enriched classes. This will be followed by summary comments.

The school district for which these lessons are being created lies in an outer-ring suburb of a major Midwestern metropolitan area. The district is made up of three small, rural towns and bedroom communities. The town from which a majority of the students come holds roughly 15,000 people. There are five elementary schools that feed into one middle school with a population of about 1,350 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. This middle school, in turn, feeds into one high school. The district itself has a very wide spectrum of socioeconomic diversity. There are wealthy families that live in expensive homes in nice developments, and conversely, students who are or have been homeless, live in trailer homes or their vehicles. Twenty-five percent of the district receives free/reduced lunch, and many students at the middle school take home backpacks of food from the school counselors so they can have meals over the weekend. There is just as wide a spectrum academically: 37% of the students in the district are not proficient at reading and 33% are not proficient at math. Conversely, there is enough of a population that qualifies as “gifted” to have created an entirely separate program for them.

Although there have been enriched / advanced classes offered at the high school for some time, only since 2005 have some of these opportunities been offered at the middle school.



Advanced math has been offered to eighth-graders for many years and, since 2006, enriched classes have been offered in English. The school distinguishes between *advanced* and *enriched* for high school credit: advanced classes are worth one high school credit, enriched classes are not.

In 2010 a new, more comprehensive, advanced program known as “Quest” began at the elementary school in grade four through six. The Quest program, originally based on curriculum models from the University of William and Mary, includes English, math and science. In 2011, those former sixth graders needed a continuation of the program, so Quest entered the middle school. Since its inception, this program has gone through several changes. For its first several years, it was entirely self-contained in that students who qualified for the program automatically had all of their core class curricula modified. In addition, the group travelled to each of their classes without any outside students; completely contained homogeneous grouping. In subsequent years, that was modified to an “a la carte” philosophy where students could be in just the Quest classes they qualified for. If a student only qualified in English, for example, they could be in just that Quest class. This, however, created several scheduling problems and a feeling that the program was becoming diluted.

The Enriched program has, likewise, had some problems; the biggest of which is numbers. For several of its years, the program has identified a large number of students who qualify. The problem is that the number has been too high for a single class, but not high enough for two. This has created two questions. One, do we have just one class with a waiting list and know that several students aren’t being served the way they need to be? Or do we create two classes and fill in the second with students who are close to qualifying, but don’t? From

experience, option one has played out as the better option when those on the waiting list had teachers who knew they needed to differentiate; meaning, when students were identified as qualifying for enrichment but weren't able to get into the class, having teachers aware of the situation helped them meet the students' needs.

Another issue the program has faced is how often to test. When the program started, once kids were identified, they remained in the program until they didn't want to be any more. This made it very difficult to get into the program, especially for students joining the middle school from the one Catholic school in town, or open enrolling from anywhere else. That issue has been resolved with yearly testing. Each spring, students who want to apply for the program can and are all tested. The list is created from there. This guiding principle under the program's new director is referred to as "Challenge by Choice." That philosophy illustrates the idea that we want students in the program who *want* to be in the program.

To find the students that qualified for the enriched English program, several scores were evaluated, including students' Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) scores. Also, until two years ago, a writing sample was required of each of students at the time of application and their overall grades were considered as a measure of their work ethic. Recently, the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), which now has norms for the gifted range of students, has been used to identify students for the Enriched program as well. The theory behind having several tools to identify students stems from the acknowledgement that in general, test scores are a snapshot of students' abilities. By putting several of these "snapshots" together, one can create a bigger picture of the students' abilities. Also, as programs like this need to create a defensible process, more than one score is always beneficial.

The curriculum from which I am adopting lessons is the Pearson Publishing / Prentice Hall *Language and Literacy, Grade Eight Edition* published in 2012. The textbook is divided into six major units. Those major units revolve around what the text calls “The Big Question.” It is the central question that serves as the focus of the unit and around which all of the reading selections are centered. These questions are as follows:

Unit 1: *Is the truth the same for everyone?* (Fiction and Nonfiction)

Unit 2: *Can all conflicts be resolved?* (Short Stories)

Unit 3: *How much information is enough?* (Types of Nonfiction)

Unit 4: *What is the secret to reaching someone with words?* (Poetry)

Unit 5: *Is it our differences or our similarities that matter most?* (Drama)

Unit 6: *Are yesterday’s heroes important today?* (Themes in American Stories)

So, to answer the question, “*How can I take an English curriculum and enrich it to better challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students,*” I’ve chosen to present the following outline for Unit 2, Short Stories. The outline has been created from the basic Pearson Publishing / Prentice Hall curriculum by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teaching team using it. Keep in mind that the text is set up in a way that it gives the teachers some autonomy within the units themselves. Not everything provided in the text is intended to be taught by every teacher.

On the page you will see the unit laid out with the materials the teachers have collectively chosen to use on the left side. To the right, you’ll observe modifications that have been made for the sake of the Enriched English class. Those are in bold.

## **Unit 2-Can All Conflicts be Resolved?**

Unit 2 skills: *Elements of a short story*

- Pp. 232-236
- Use “*On the Bridge*” **“Harrison Burgeron”**
  - *review and illustrate elements*
  - *element focus: setting page 245*

Unit 2 skills: *compare/contrast and character traits*

*“The Tell-Tale Heart” pp. 292-303*

*element focus: character traits*

- *Read the story as a group*
    - *Use resources or create own (resources 80-99)*
    - *Compare/contrast of characters and character*
- Complete open book test in groups from Unit 2 Resources*

*Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) test practice*

- *Pp. 306-307 Compare and Contrast*

Unit 2 skills: *Compare and Contrast & Writing Workshop*

- *Students select one of two narratives*
    - *“Up the Slide” pp. 314-320*
    - *“Glow in the Dark” pp. 321-324*
- Partner up with a student who read the other story*
- *Complete pp. 108-110 together*

**Web-page Creation and Quiz Project**

***Intro webpage and show how to create links.***

***Use guidelines on home page***

***Create quizzes***

Unit 2 Skills: *Inferences and Point-of-view p. 333*

- *Flowers for Algernon unit*
- *Vocabulary on 344*
  - *Review and learn*
  - *Do activity of choice from website*

*Discuss IQ and try some tests*

*Read Flowers for Algernon pp. 345-380*

- *Unit 2 resources pages 132, 133, 135*

*Open book test 136-137*

*Watch movie “Flowers for Algernon”*

*Write critical review, according to your schedule*

***Introduce actual Rorschach slides***

***explain inherent problems***

***MENSA and other online sample tests.***

Unit 2 Skills: *Making Inferences and Theme p. 385*

- *“Thank You Ma’am” p. 388-393*
- *Pp. 171-172 in Unit 2 resources*

*MCA test practice*

One will notice almost right away that not everything between the regular and enriched class is different. If you recall, according to Guthrie's article (2003, p.3) enrichment "provides gifted children with opportunities to explore topics and issues from the regular curriculum in greater breadth and depth...." It is important to make this distinction. Some students who go into enrichment classes are under the impression that they will be doing completely different things from their non-enriched peers and are actually upset when they find that is not the case. Therefore it is important for us to verbalize that the enriched class is based on the regular curriculum and differs by its greater depth.

Now, as you continue to observe the outline, you will also see that in some cases, the enriched students *will* be doing something completely different. This is equally important to verbalize.

For the enriched curriculum for the introduction to this unit, not much is different other than the choice of the short stories themselves. Toward the beginning of the unit, to introduce the topic, the enriched class will use the story "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. The story was chosen because it relates well to the gifted students themselves. They are able to connect with the main character and vividly imagine a world where people are actually persecuted for their talents and gifts. The discussion quickly leads into ways that that persecution is already happening. For the most part, the enriched students are getting the same lesson on short story elements as the non-enriched students, but they are getting it with a different story and a more in-depth discussion than would happen in a regular class. Sometimes, that's enough to make a lesson enriched.

As you continue through the outline of unit two, you'll notice an online supplement for the enriched class. Though it may be obvious, it can still be noted that most enriched students understand concepts, such as the elements of a short story, much more quickly than do most students in regular classes. Therefore, an opportunity exists to supplement the unit with additional lessons. The web page assignment is one such supplement I'll describe in detail later in the chapter.

The first lesson I'd like to discuss with modifications, is the lesson based around the story "Flowers for Algernon." Introducing this lesson can be fun, especially when the teacher describes it as a story about a man who desperately wants something that enriched readers have: intelligence.

When discussing intelligence with gifted students, there are many avenues one can take. In this case, the class starts with a discussion of IQ. What does it mean? How is it derived? Does it really serve a purpose? Most of the enriched students seem to know where they rank in regard to IQ, so this discussion is of particular interest, especially when we discuss the IQ's of some culturally iconic figures, celebrities, and other famous (and infamous) people. It's interesting, as well, to discuss the low end of the spectrum since that's where the main character of the story starts. We use a writing prompt that always creates wonderful discussion. It is, "*Would you rather be smart or popular?*" We've started this way for several years now because as we get into the story, the students see that the main character, Charlie, associates being smart with being popular. He thinks that if he could just be smart, then he would be accepted by the people he considers to be friends.

Additionally, MENSA has a website with a practice test. The enriched students really like taking this. It's a chance for them to see how they measure up to the best of the best. It's also interesting for the students to see which subjects they struggle with more than others. In many cases it just confirms what they already know. Other supplements can include an introduction to the Rorschach tests that the main character was subject to. This discussion can include not just interpreting the Rorschach images themselves but a discussion of why, for the most part, they are no longer used. Finally, there is opportunity for great discussion and even research when the teacher introduces the difference between the conscious and subconscious minds. Several YouTube videos provide some great explanations and illustrations of how the two are connected and how they work.

As one final supplement, since some students will show a great interest in how brains work, it's interesting to introduce Phineas Gage, the man who in 1848 had an iron rod shoot through his brain which didn't kill him. The discussion is often about what we knew about the brain before the accident, what we have been able to learn from it, and then why it took something so horrific to have the chance to explore the brain in general. Now, don't be fooled and think that all of the students will find this interesting. Some will read the book just because it covers one of their reading commitments, but being exposed to books, ideas and such that they normally wouldn't be exposed to can be very beneficial.

As you can see, all of these small modifications to the standard curriculum can be made with little or no budget increases and minimal additional materials. Yet, they make a difference in the types of discussions that classes can have, and this is what enriching a curriculum is about at its core.

At this point I would like to discuss two assignments that are supplemental and not included in the regular English curriculum. As mentioned before, since the Enriched and Gifted classes can generally move through material faster than regular classes do, there is usually ample opportunity for supplements like these. The first of these projects is labeled as the Web-page Creation and Quiz Project.

When my enriched class was reading short stories several years ago, I was surprised to discover how few short stories they'd read and how limited their references were. I set out to create an assignment that would expose a large number of readers to a large number of short stories, or in essence, get as many students to read as many stories as I could. The result was an assignment which led each student to read at least five stories.

As you can see, the following assignment is relatively self-explanatory. As I mentioned, the goal of the assignment is simply exposure to various works of short fiction. In Step 1, students are to search, by means of the internet, library, or conversation with parents, etc, for a short story that interests them. This not only allows them the autonomy to focus on a genre that interests them, but also allows them to use various resources, even each other. By the time they've found a story they like, they've read at least most of two or three other stories. The goal of exposure is being met.

Step 2 of the assignment requires the student to create a quiz for their story of choice. The requirements are specific but still allow the students to be creative. Notice they need to include vocabulary words (of their choosing) and that their questions need to be of two different styles: either multiple-choice, short answer or other. The reason the students are creating a quiz and not



answering the questions on one of mine is because it gives them the opportunity to pick apart the story and focus on the parts they think are important.

Step 3 of the assignment is to attach everything. A link to their story and a link to their quiz document need to be attached to the web page that I create for them as a member of the class. This is the technology integration portion of the assignment and one that will hopefully hook the students' interest if the freedom of story choice does not. The web page is created on Google Docs under each of their names. On this page they can be as creative as their ability allows them, but a summary of that story, a link to the story, and their quiz document are required.

As explained, steps 1-3 are the first part of the assignment. The next part of the assignment is to look through each others' web pages and chose, based on the summary written for it, and which stories they'd like to read. As the assignment states, they'll need to read three of their peers' stories, and answer the questions on those corresponding assessments. This will give them the chance to meet the challenge that their peers have set for them.

This assignment provides autonomy and room for creativity. It unquestionably meets the goal of increasing exposure to short stories by having each of my 36 students read at least four or more stories. If every student reads only four stories during this assignment, that's more than 140 short stories that were read. There is no way I could teach 140 short stories and get anything else done. It's many more than I could introduce the class to in a regular unit.

Below, I have included what the actual assignment page looks like. When I introduce this project to the class, I give them the following as a handout. It should also be said that I do take

the time to show them how to create links from the internet to their web pages. Though some students know already, and it's very beneficial to ask their help in explaining things, because I do not assume that all students have that background knowledge.

*Enriched English 8*

*Short Story Web page Assignment*

*Due \_\_\_\_\_*

*This assignment is designed to expose students to a large number of short stories from various authors and genres.*

**PART I**

**Step 1:** Find a short story that you like. You should search the internet for one that appeals to you on some level. DO NOT just pick one randomly as your lack of interest will show in the rest of your work. When deciding on a story, choose one that takes you 7 to 10 minutes to read, not much more than that. You may have to read two or three stories before you find the one you want to work with.

*By the end of step 1 you should have completely read the story you're choosing and be very familiar with it.*

**Step 2:** When you have finished reading the story and have decided to use it, you need to create a quiz to go with it. When creating the quiz, include 5-10 vocab. words in addition to 10 other questions. The 10 questions need to be formatted in at least 2 different ways. (ex. Multiple choice, short answer, matching, etc.) This can be either as a Google Doc, a Google Form or another creation of your choosing.

**Step 3:** To your webpage, you will need to attach three (3) things. The first is a short summary of your story. Don't include any spoilers because you want people to choose to read your story. Make the summary intriguing and enticing. It does not need to be more than 5-8 sentences. Next, create a link on your page, to your story. You may use a word or an image or whatever your knowledge and creativity allow. Finally, include a link to your quiz.

**\*\*\*This concludes the first half of the assignment.\*\*\***

**PART II**

*Step1: At this point, it will be your job to read three other students' short stories and take their quizzes.*

The next project assignment I would like to include goes along with the reading of "The Diary of Anne Frank." My colleague and I created this assignment during a year when there were two sections (classes) of Enriched English. We were surprised at the number of students

who admittedly thought that events like the Holocaust didn't happen anymore. They thought genocides and politicides were a thing of the past. We knew that the project would take some time and was really a research project at its core, but associating it with Anne Frank felt like appropriate timing.

The project starts with the teacher introducing what we call "literary lenses." These lenses were adapted from the work that one of the high school College In the Schools, or CIS teachers did in conjunction with the University of Minnesota. She gave us permission to use and adapt them to our students' needs. If you'll look at the list of lenses below, you'll see that, in addition to a small tutorial on how to use the lenses, the lenses themselves are organized first into a "Big Question," the guiding question, if you will, of what the lens will focus on; assumptions that using the lenses makes; and then essentially, how to use it. I also point out that for this project, some of the lenses work better than others.

Whichever of the theories the students chooses, I do discourage them from using the Reader Response Theory. First, because it is the most common and has already been used extensively in class, and second, because the project has to be written in the first person. The handout is as follows:

Critical Lenses  
Contemporary Literary Theory

*Until lions tell their stories, tales of hunting will glorify the hunter.*  
**-African Proverb**

*The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.*  
**-F. Scott Fitzgerald**

**Choosing Critical Lenses**

*The way that we read a text is always a **choice**. The interpretation of a text depends on active, conscious decisions on the part of the reader.*

**Hints to Remember:**

1. No single lens always gives the clearest view; all have strengths and limitations.
2. Applying different lenses to the same text can reveal new features of that text.
3. It is easier for novices to apply one lens at a time
4. Understanding lenses is a journey, not a destination. Understanding will come slowly, often in fits and starts.
5. Turning lenses on your own life can help you understand more about literature and yourself.
6. The following descriptions are simplified; most lenses are based on years of scholarly research and debate.

**Reader Response Theory**

**Big Question:** How does this text reflect the experience, beliefs and understanding of its reader?

**Assumptions:**

- Most readers learn this theory first and don't move beyond it.
- The text does not exist without a reader.
- Reading is the active process of evaluating personal response to a text.
- A reader's changing perceptions, which occur during reading, are valuable.

**What to Do:**

- Move through the text carefully and slowly, marking or writing down your responses and how they change while reading.
- Describe your responses to the text using evidence and explanation in the form of quotes, pg. numbers and clear explanations.
- When done reading, respond to text as a whole, expressing both subjective and personal responses it engenders.

### **Feminist (Gender) Theory**

**Big Question:** How does this text reinforce, critique or challenge definitions of femininity and masculinity?

**Assumptions:**

- Texts cannot exist without gender as a frame of reference.
- Historically, writing and interpretation have been dominated by men and masculine perceptions.
- Men and women are different, which should be recognized and valued. Differences may be in social behavior, ideas and/or values, cultural and racial norms and opportunities, etc.

**What to Do:**

- Consider gender of author and/or characters. What role does gender or sexuality play in this work?
- Look at the effects of power drawn from gender in the work.
- Ask how the text reinforces or undermines gender stereotypes and/or roles

### **Post-colonial (Colonization) Theory**

**Big Question:** How does this text comment on, represent, or repress the marginalized voices caused by colonization?

**Assumptions:**

- Colonization is the exploitation of 1 national or ethnic or racial group by another. It can be a powerful & destructive force that disrupts both groups.
- Colonized societies are forced into the margins by colonizers. Colonized people seen as different and inferior to colonizers. (called "Othering")
- Lit written by **colonizers** distorts realities and experiences of colonized. Lit written by **colonized** attempts to redefine or preserve a sense of cultural identity.

**What to Do:**

- Explore how the text represents a colonized people or cultural group.
- Ask how text creates images of "others." How does text show a colonial mindset?
- Ask how conflicts in text might be viewed as cultural conflicts.

### **Structural Theory (Narrator)**

**Big Question:** What does analysis of the text's form reveal about its meaning?

**Assumptions:**

- There is a difference between story and plot.
- Texts tend to build up/break down patterns we can use to help interpret.
- Analyzing the way a story is told helps reveal a story's meaning.
- Who tells a story deeply influences our understanding of literature.

**What to Do:**

- Analyze structural elements such as chapters, parts, epigraphs etc.
- Examine treatment of time such as use of flashback and/or non-linear storyline.
- Look at **who** is telling the story. How does narrator's involvement affect text?

- Explore number of stories told. Is there a “frame” and “embedded” story? Examine contrasts/parallels and weight given each part of the story.

### **Marxist (Social Power) Theory**

**Big Question:** How does this text comment on or represent social class conflict?

**Assumptions:**

- Karl Marx argued that the way people think and behave is determined by basic economic factors.
- Marx felt that the wealthy class exploits the working class by forcing their values and beliefs on them, usually through control of money.
- These ideas can be applied to the study of literature, which is often a product of cultural and social conflict.

**What to Do:**

- Explore how different economic classes are represented in text.
- Examine effects of power drawn from social or economic class.
- Link text to social class of author and make connections.
- Examine how text itself functions as a means of class control.

### **Trauma Theory**

**Big Question:** What violent actions have occurred to characters in the text and/or to its creator and how has that violence affected them?

**Assumptions:**

- Trauma impels people to withdraw and to seek close relationships **simultaneously**.
- Victims tend to have intense but unstable relationships with partners.
- Trauma resulting from a natural disaster (flood, tornado, fire) is easy for readers to understand.
- When trauma is caused by human sources (war, abuse, torture), readers are caught between the victim and perpetrator, especially if the literary work allows the perpetrator a “story” of his or her own.

**What to Do:** Look for the following, displayed by victims of trauma in the text:

- No sense of safety in the world around them.
- A belief that sense of autonomy has been violated in the most basic sense.
- A sense of being invaded, defiled and out of control.
- Doubt in themselves and others.
- A certainty that their faith system and feeling of community has been damaged, often irrevocably.

### **Post-Modern (Deconstruction) Theory**

**Big Question:** How does the work undermine or contradict generally accepted truths?

**Assumptions:**

- The author is not creator of meaning. (death of author).
- The universe, and hence the text, has no fixed center or meaning.
- Language has little or no ability to communicate variable truths.

**What to Do:**

- Notice paradoxes and contradictions.
- Take notice of omissions and absences.
- Look for text breaks in time, viewpoint and tone.
- Be aware of internal conflicts in characters, story and text/subtext

Having these lenses acts as a guide for how the students absorb the information and the research they have discovered. As was mentioned, a key element of this project is that after their research, they are putting themselves in the shoes of a character who experienced various events. If you look below, the actual assignment sheet has been included. This is what the students are given.

*English- Marginalized Journal Project*

*Research and discover what other instances of genocide and/or politicide have occurred SINCE 1945. You will have three days this week to research and write about what you find. You will have 10 days total to work on this (not all of them in class). Final draft due \_\_\_\_\_*

**Purpose:** *To discover that genocide is not something that just happened during WWII, but continues in modern history as well, and start to understand the cultural impact of such events .*

**What to do:** *Once you decide on an event from recent history, you should research, read and learn as much as you can about your chosen event. Remember that you will be creating the project from the perspective of a person who was there. So, you should try to filter the information through one of the critical literary lenses we discuss. This will guide how your "character" reacts and speaks to us.*

**What to look for and include:** *Where did it take place, When, Who were the offenders and who were the victims? What happened to the victims, What caused it - (what "reason" or "purpose" did it serve in the eyes of the offenders). What was the outcome? (was there justice, reparations, etc.?)*

**What to write:**

*The first page should explain who your character is (in your words). Include a name, age, family info etc. (for your character). Explain where the event is taking place, when and why. This intro page is written by you with your words talking to the reader. Try to avoid too much detail (save that for your character).*

*The second section should consist of 10 days worth of journal entries. They do not need to be 10 days in a row, just a total of 10 at least three paragraphs long (12-15 sentences). In this section, much like Anne Frank did at the beginning, your character should try to explain what is happening around them and why. They should go into detail about the events, what their understanding of the events is, etc. The reader should learn about the tragedies of this event from your character.*

*The final page should consist of two things: your personal thoughts and feelings about the events you discovered, and a short reflection on the project itself. How do you feel about what you discovered? What surprised you the most? Can you even imagine having to go through such an ordeal? Add whatever you want to share.*

**Word of caution:**

*Especially in times of war, human beings can have the capacity to do horrific things to one another. Some of the things you discover in your research will be difficult to read about, let alone trying to imagine experiencing. The story your character shares should be a reflection of your comfort level with some of the atrocities you learn about. If you would be uncomfortable talking about these things, you do not have to make your character talk about them either.*

**Possible choices:**

*Bosnia / Herzegovina  
Cambodia  
Darfur  
Ethiopia  
Guatemala  
Kosovo  
Lebanon  
Pakistan  
Republic of Congo  
Rwanda  
Somalia  
China*

Please notice that even though there are specific guidelines and requirements, the students actually have a large amount of autonomy with the project. They are researching an incident of their choice; they are creating a character of whatever age and gender they choose to tell the story, and they are deciding how to create and present the journal. All of these things add to the choice that the students get with this assignment.

The last thing I want to share is an assessment that I created to go with “A Christmas Carol.” The unabridged version of the novella by Charles Dickens is something that I’ve been teaching in the Enriched English class since I began. Readers, even in the enriched class, typically struggle with story. Not the story itself, though. In one way or another they are all familiar with the actual story; Scrooge, Tiny Tim, etc. But very few of them have read the book in its original language. This assignment doesn’t throw them to the wolves, so to speak; by this point they have read a few short stories by Edgar Allen Poe and Mark Twain. Still, the language



and its familiar tone, often riddled with tangents pertinent only to the period, creates a struggle for them.

While we read, we focus heavily on the context of the story, specifically the conditions in London at the time. We look extensively at Dickens' personal background and his personal reasons for writing the story. That, then, was the impetus for the creation of this assessment. The assessment, as you can see below, again provides choice to the students. I have been careful to create three options that I feel are similar in the amount of work that they require. The one thing that even enriched students look at first, is the amount of work involved; they are 14 year-olds after all.

The assessment provides three choices. The first focuses on theme. The first part requires them to look up a little bit more about Charles Dickens' life. This allows the students to get to know more of his context and more easily allows for connections to various themes. They get to speculate about what the major themes in the story are. Next, they must agree or disagree with ideas I proffer. They have to support their arguments, but they can agree or disagree as they like. Lastly, they research other philanthropists and create connections to Dickens and his character, Scrooge.

The second option is to look at the story as something other than what it is. Though Dickens' work is actually a work of fiction, the students have to look at it as a work of persuasion. Dickens creates a persuasive argument through his characters to be nicer to our "fellow man." This allows them to explore their own attitudes toward poverty, generosity, etc. By looking at the story as a persuasive essay, the students choosing this option have to identify

the elements of nonfiction as if it actually were. They identify elements such as central idea, tone, and organizational patterns.

The third option is to look at different categories of literature. This option introduces them to Romantic, Victorian and Gothic literature. It gives the students a very brief introduction to those terms and some general characteristics. The students, then, must find elements in the story that fit into these various categories, and explain the why and how. Finally, students have to determine for themselves which of the three they think the story fits best. In all of these options, students are using textual evidence to support the arguments they choose to answer. The following assignment page explains all of the details for this assessment.

***For this project, you will choose ONE (1) of the topics to write about / discuss. Your response should be posted on your Blog site and is due \_\_\_\_\_.***

*Some of your responses will require the use of outside sources such as the internet. Citing sources is not necessary because the hope is you'll formulate your own answers based on the info you find.*

**Topic 1: Theme Discussion**

1. *Look up a little bit about Charles Dickens' life and develop some theories about what in his real life may have sparked some of the major themes in his novel. (Another idea includes looking up the conditions in London specifically during his time period.) Share what you found in at least a complete paragraph. (5-7 sentences)*
2. ***Support or Refute:*** *Support or refute the ideas of the following as major themes in the novel. Use examples from your research and from the book. One paragraph for each.*
  - *Criticism of economic disparity and class structure in London.*
  - *A lesson of free will and redemption.*
  - *Humanity and charity toward our fellow "man" (especially children).*
3. ***Look up:*** *Find information and write a brief bio of three modern philanthropists. Be sure to include the causes they work toward, and what has/does motivate(d) them. Any similarities to Dickens' message? Explain.*

**Topic 2: Dickens' Christmas Carol as a persuasive essay.**

*Though Dickens' work is actually fiction and isn't considered persuasion, he makes some very persuasive points in this story. The idea of this project is to look at "A Christmas Carol" as a persuasive essay and support that viewpoint the best you can.*

The paper does not need to be more than a page, size 12 font, double-spaced. **Make sure you include the following points:**

- If this were an essay and the author's purpose was to persuade, what would be **the central (or main) idea**. What is the message of the story? Show support from the text.
- What would you say is the **tone** of the piece? If tone is most easily created with vocabulary, give at least three examples of vocabulary that you think supports the tone you chose. (You may need to look up "tone in nonfiction" to refresh your memory.)
- If we look at this as a persuasion, what are some of the **persuasive techniques** Dickens uses? Do your best to identify any and all that you can and give textual examples. (May look up logos, pathos, and ethos to help.)
- Identify any of the common **organizational patterns** in this piece. Try your best to illustrate them.

### **Topic 3: What Period Does it fit?**

Using some of the information on the adjacent page, you need to decide which literary period "A Christmas Carol" fits in best.

In no more than a page (font size 12) explain in what ways "A Christmas Carol" fits into all three literary categories (Romantic, Victorian, and Gothic – roughly one paragraph each) Use specific examples from the text when making your points and explain how and why it fits.

Next, choose the period YOU think it fits in best. Explain why you think so and don't be afraid to go against convention. Dickens is a well-known Victorian author, but is the common Victorian message of social injustice (for example) what he meant for this novel? Perhaps you think the story had a different message.

*\*\*Except for quotes from the book, this should be entirely in your own words, not cut and pasted. When done you should easily have a page worth. Some research beyond the page given, may be necessary.*

### **A very abridged, general timeline of literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

#### **Romantic period, 1770's-1830's**

Generally speaking, the backdrop for this period was Great Britain's industrial revolution. During this industrialization, the Romantics focused heavily on emotion, idealism and often wrote in praise of nature; some say in an effort to hold on to what many people thought they were losing. Romantic literature is also characterized by the character's willingness to set reason aside for what he/she believes in (their idealism).

#### **Victorian period, 1837-1901**

Some major events that took place during the Victorian era include:

- A **huge growth in population**. During Victoria's reign, the population of England more than doubled, from 14 million to 32 million.
- There were also some significant **improvements in technology**. The Victorian era slightly overlaps with Britain's Industrial Revolution, which saw big changes to the way that people lived, worked, and traveled. These improvements in technology offered a lot of opportunities for the people in England but also represented a major upheaval in regards to how people lived their lives and interacted with the world.

- Another characteristic of the Victorian era was **changing world views**. In addition to the major developments in technology, there were emerging scientific beliefs, like Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Those things changed how people in England thought about themselves and how they interacted with the world around them. Most notably, a lot of people were distancing themselves from the church.
- And finally, there were **poor conditions for the working class**. The Industrial Revolution led to an increase in the distance between the "haves" and "have-nots" by a large margin, and a lot of people (especially artists, and writers) felt obligated to speak out against what they believed to be societal injustices.

Victorian literature is largely characterized by the struggle of working people speaking out against social injustice (ex. economic disparity), and the triumph of right over wrong. Spiritualism also became prevalent during this period.

### **Gothic, late 1700's to the early 1800's**

Spanning the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a particular type of story-writing known as Gothic. The old Gothic tales that came out of the 19th century are the first examples of the genre of fantastic fiction. Gothic literature combines romance and horror in attempt to thrill and terrify the reader. It is characterized by elements of fear, horror, death, and gloom, as well as romantic elements, such as nature, individuality, and very high emotion. Features in gothic novels can also include monsters, ghosts, curses, and witchcraft. Gothic tales usually take place in locations such as castles, monasteries, and cemeteries, although the gothic monsters sometimes cross over into the real world, making appearances in cities such as London or Paris, making them more sinister.

## **Chapter Four**

In this chapter, I'll discuss how the specific assignments and assessments were received and how the students performed on them. I'll be discussing how the results respond to the research question and data analysis that describes the information collected.

I'll start with the "Flowers for Algernon" assignment. Though "Flowers for Algernon" has been in text books for the last thirty years or so, I won't assume you remember it entirely. The story, first published in 1959 by Daniel Keyes, centers around a man named Charlie who is of lower than average intelligence, but wants to be smarter than he is. He thinks that if he could be smarter, it would solve all of his problems. Primarily, he thinks, he'd have more friends. In

going to night school for adults of his own free will, his teacher recommends him for a procedure that could increase his intelligence. He's all for that, and so he agrees. The tragic irony in the story is that once Charlie becomes smart, he is *so* smart that he still can't make friends. The story concludes with the procedure not lasting, and Charlie regressing to his level intelligence prior to the procedure.

Before we get going in the story, I asked the students to write a journal entry; "*Would you rather be smart or popular?*" At the beginning, the students didn't know what was behind the question or where it was going. They didn't know what was going to happen to Charlie, so they thought more about themselves and, I think, were more honest. The significance of the journal prompt came into focus for them later. Most of them rationalized that they would rather be smart because then they could figure out how to make friends. Though this rationalization surprised me a little at first, over the years I have realized that this response is very common with this population of students because they are often very logical and pragmatic. My hope, though, with the prompt wasn't so much to access prior knowledge as one would usually do when introducing a lesson, but to get them thinking about what they really value. Do they value friendship and acceptance, or do they place more value on intelligence and the ability to out-perform their peers? Since, in this day and age, fewer and fewer students have to make that choice, I find it interesting to discuss their logic when they do have to choose.

In the course of discussing their responses to the writing prompt, we transitioned into what it means to be "smart." Since they've obviously been labeled as such, giving them the opportunity to talk about being smart, labeled "enriched," or however one would put it, and what it means to them was very interesting. Some had experienced some trouble with friend when they

were put in enriched classes and their friends weren't. Letting them discuss this was revealing and served to create a bond among us at the same time.

When we were discussing what it means to be "smart," many of the students were able to articulate that there seemed to be different kinds of "smart." The differentiation they made, however, was between what they called "book" smart and "street" smart. At that point, I took the opportunity to do something that I had done with only one other class, but I felt that since the students themselves had touched on it, it was appropriate to explore. I took this opportunity to introduce them to Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

In 1983, Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Gardner chose eight areas or abilities that he held to meet the criteria of various intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Although the distinction between intelligences has been set out in great detail in his book, Gardner opposes the idea of labeling learners to a specific intelligence. Gardner maintains that his theory of multiple intelligences should "empower learners", not restrict them to one modality of learning. (McKenzie, 2005)

That day, at the end of our discussion, I gave them the assignment to look up Gardner's theory. I didn't want it too detailed because it was just an introduction, but I wanted them to be aware of the theory. They were to write a very brief summary of the theory, in their own words, and then explain how it applied to them.

What I was hoping to do with this small assignment was to introduce them to a legitimately accepted theory that qualified their ideas from the day before. They came into class

the next day ready to share which “intelligence” they most identified with. It was fun to see them identify with the intelligences at which they were good. The other thing I found interesting was that in simply being made aware of the idea of different intelligences, it became ok for them *not* to be good at certain things. Some seemed more able to accept, for example, that they just weren’t good at “logic-mathematical.” In any case this provoked a lot of conversation about what the students are good at.

In the past, I have also taken the opportunity to discuss the ideas of Donna Ford that suggest when the things that a specific culture values are included, even more people qualify as gifted. I did not have the chance to discuss the Yale study that discovered that when a wider range of abilities was tested - analytical, creative and practical intelligences, a much larger group of students than were normally identified by tests, qualified as “gifted” (Sternberg, 1997).

Very briefly, we discussed IQ. Most of the students had heard of it and seemed to have a good idea of what it measured. I showed them a slideshow of some celebrities who had surprisingly high IQ’s, and in some cases surprisingly low ones. They seemed to enjoy that. Part of the discussion, though, focused on why the IQ is not used very much anymore. I found it interesting that several of the students thought IQ was a much bigger deal than it really is. I like discussing IQ with them at this point, because then they’re aware of theories like Gardner’s and so they seem to understand better why IQ is less important than it used to be.

Then, as the story “Flowers For Algernon” progresses, Charlie, the main character, is subjected to several tests, including the Rorschach test. In the 1960’s, the setting of the story, the Rorschach, or “ink blot” test was still considered a legitimate test. To help students understand

the test, I showed them a slideshow of Rorschach images. We had some fun deciding what they “saw.” We also discussed why this test, being so open to interpretation by the person giving it, is one that is not used much anymore and when it fell out of favor. The truth is, I don’t test my students on what IQ means, the interpretation of Rorschach tests, or even Garner’s theory. To me this is enrichment: helping to build their frames of reference, expanding their knowledge of ideas of other people, and understanding progress by being aware of how measuring intelligence has changed. Those are the things that make a curriculum enriched and why I love having the opportunity to work with these students.

We continued to read the story in a variety of ways as I do with my regular classes. Sometimes they read silently to themselves, sometimes with partners, and other times we read together as a class. I do some periodic checks for understanding of the content, and our continued discussions served as formative assessments as well. This story, the way it’s presented in our text, lends itself to a lot of predicting and inferencing. That, too, is a big part of our discussion about the conclusion of the story; who was right, how they were able to tell, etc. Most find the ending quite sad, but some find solace in ideas like, “Maybe Charlie won’t remember he was really smart.” I like seeing the students’ contemplative, and I think our discussions allow for that.

Now, since some of my students are naturally more interested in the brain than others, one other thing I do with my enriched students that I don’t do with my regular students in connection to the story “Flowers for Algernon,” is introduce a book about Phineus Gage. *Phineus Gage: A Gruesome but True Story About Brain Science*, by John Fleischman is not only a fascinating story, but since it’s non-fiction, reading the book helps to meet their reading requirements for the quarter. Once I explained that Phineus Gage was a man who had a terrible



accident and suffered severe brain trauma without dying, several of the students were curious to see how he changed. Some read it and some choose not to, which is fine. I simply introduced it as a supplement and an option for their reading requirement. My goal, though, in introducing it, was to allow the students who wanted to pursue their curiosity, the opportunity to do so.

Generally speaking, the class did well with this story. The only summative assessment for this assignment revealed a class average of 85%. I know that that score may not seem impressive for a class that's supposed to be enriched, but I attribute the score to the primary factor that their final included a writing project that was not included in the regular-curriculum test. For the most part, the regular final looked the same, but for part of their final, they were to re-write a passage from the story, "Flowers for Algernon," as a character other than Charlie. Though I had not yet introduced the idea of critical lenses (which I would do for a later assignment), I was trying to have them see a situation from another character's point of view. This proved difficult for some and it brought down some scores. However, I'm reminded of what Guthrie said, "The constant challenges not only suit these advanced learners, but also keep them motivated" (2003). Though I want these students to succeed every bit as much as the other students, this class is designed to provide more of a challenge. Not getting an A once in awhile is ok.

The first of two supplemental projects I introduced in the previous chapter was the short story project. As I mentioned, I was really surprised by how few short stories my students seem to have read. Even the ones pop culture alludes to on a regular basis, like "A Tell Tale Heart," by Edgar Allen Poe was foreign to them. "The Gift of the Magi," by O. Henry? "The Lottery," by Shirley Jackson? Nothing, they had no frame of reference. I almost panicked. These were eighth grade, enriched students and didn't seem to have read any short stories. My goal became to

expose my students to as many short stories as I could, and to try and get them to see short stories as great works of literature. I started out with a few of my favorites, ones that have a twist at the end like “Death by Scrabble,” by Charlie Fish published in 2006, which grabs the reader’s attention with the opening line, “It is a hot day and I hate my wife.”

I moved on to “Lamb to the Slaughter,” published in 1953 by Roald Dahl, an author many of them are familiar with because of other stories like “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” and “The BFG.” They seemed to not only enjoy the story, but see another side of an author they thought they knew. This story by Dahl is about a murder and its cover-up. This whole time, we were, of course, discussing the elements of literature, and short stories specifically, but secretly, my goal was exposure; I wanted to broaden their knowledge base and widen their frame of reference.

This was my thought. If I can have them all search for a story that they personally like, they’ll have to go through at least two or three to find it. With 31 students, that would be close to 90 short stories read. I could dream of doing that many as a class. Then I decided to incorporate that research element with our technology standard by having them create a web page. The web page would be how they presented what they found.

After I introduced the students to the project and went through the expectations, guidelines, and requirements, they had about three days in class with the technology. During that time they were to find the story they wanted to use for the project (which involved a lot of reading the first day or two). Once they found that story, they were to create a summary, or teaser, which would entice people to read their story, a corresponding link, so their peers could

go to it and read it, and then a quiz for their story. Some of the most popular stories that they seem to gravitate towards are: “The Petting Zoo,” by Peter de Niverville, “The Lady or the Tiger,” by Frank Stockton, and “Hobnail,” by Crystal Arbogast. “The Lady and the Tiger,” they seem to like because of its cliffhanger ending. “The Petting Zoo,” and “Hobnail” are listed under the “horror” genre and I think some of the students like the creepy stories. As a note, what worked well with this and other assignments that require technology, is to provide class time on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. That way if they need more time they’d have the weekend to finish up.

The idea of having them create a quiz instead having them take one, came to me *after* I hatched the idea of having them read all of these short stories. *How in the world was I going to assess them on all of these different stories they’ve read? Not even I had read them all.* The answer came from an idea I read when researching how to successfully assess students in literature circles who are reading different novels. The idea was to have them create an assessment instead of take one. By seeing what they choose as the main idea and the key elements of the story, I could still assess their understanding and comprehension of what they read. That’s the idea I applied here. I did give them some guidelines as to what kinds of questions to include, but other than that, they were on their own to choose the elements of the story that they thought were important. As a reminder of the guidelines from the last chapter, what I gave them included the number of questions (15) and what kind they had to be (at least five vocabulary words), and ten more questions of at least two different types—multiple choice, true/false, etc.) Also, when they found out their peers were actually going to take the quiz, it added a little extra incentive to make their quizzes challenging.

Most of the quizzes proved to be very well done. I encourage them to ask questions about the elements of fiction we'd been studying, and they identified those elements of setting, plot, and characterization very well. Their attention to detail and their creativity were also a very nice surprise. I was really happy with how well they did.

My goal of having them read two or three stories before they found their project choice, was reached. Most of the students did in fact read about two short stories before finding the one on which they would base their project. The assignment sheet I provided in Chapter 3, provided all the information they needed, so many went right on to creating their webpage. The pages I started for them are on Google Sites and are very user friendly. Most of the students knew how to navigate through this with no trouble. The one exception was helping them create links from their pages to their stories and quizzes. Once they figured that out, it took little time to finish.

Once part one of the project was done, I gave them some time in class to read each others' stories and take each others' quizzes. The students who knew how to use Google Forms and set up their quizzes using that, got feedback right away, but the ones who did not, had to correct the quizzes of those who read and took theirs. This provided some unintended feedback. I heard several students reply that some of their quizzes were too easy because everyone was getting 100%. Some noticed that their quizzes were too hard or too specific, and some realized that some people took the quizzes without having read the story at all. I found that making those quizzes part of their grade was beneficial in helping to motivate them.

Overall I thought the project was successful. In addition to the four or five stories we read together, each student in the class read two or three stories before finding the one they wanted to

focus on. They then also read two or three more of their peers' chosen stories. That's over 100 short stories being read in my class in about 10 days' time. I consider that successfully meeting my goal of mass exposure to short stories and broadening the students' frames of reference. In discussing the project, a lot of them wound up finding short stories that they really liked. Furthermore, they wound up liking a lot of each others' stories too.

The final numbers for the project were impressive. The class average for the short story project was 98%. Almost everyone met all of the requirements and did an admirable job. There were a few students, as in any classroom, that preferred not to do as much work and just used the first story they found. This seems to happen with every group. On the other hand, what boosted the average was the number of students who asked if they could do more than the project required. Awarding extra credit for those extra efforts helped bring up the average. Likewise, when all of this was done, the summative assessment over the elements of short stories, the unit that this project was intended to support, produced a class average of 91%.

The second of the two supplemental assignments I included was the "Marginalized Journal Project." Over the past several years, this has been an assignment that I look forward to very much because I know my students, regardless of their ideas and attitudes going in, will get something valuable out of it. This year was no different.

As a reminder from the last chapter, this project evolved from the discovery, that after reading "The Diary of Anne Frank," many students were unaware that things *like* the Holocaust have actually happened *since* the Holocaust. This project provided an opportunity to combine our research standard with the introduction of critical lenses. I started by introducing what I referred

to in the last chapter as “critical literary lenses.” As I mentioned, these were developed by one of the teachers in the local high school, in conjunction with the University of Minnesota, for her “College in the Schools,” or CIS, literature class.

The students all chose to research a genocide, a “politicide,” or ethnic cleansing that occurred *since* 1945 (when, of course, World War II ended). With incidents in countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Darfur, Guatemala and others, there unfortunately have been many to choose from. The students were given three class periods to do as much research as they could and were instructed to read and find out everything they could about an incident. The ultimate goal of this writing was to have the students write as if they were actually a person who was there. These “journals” were to be written by a character each student creates from scratch. When the research was done, the students chose a critical literary lens that they thought would match their character and their series of events.

As it turned out, most of the students did a fantastic job. They were creative with their characters, creative with their journals, and very creative with their narratives. Most students chose to use the “trauma” lens, I think because it’s obvious and easily describable for their first use of lenses. Also, trauma fits the circumstances they all researched very well. Occasionally, I had a student who broke from the norm and tried something different. There was one female student who created a male character and wrote as if she were he. I was impressed that a 14-year-old girl was able to create a character that was a 20-year-old male medical student and write as that person.

Likewise, I was impressed when another (14-year-old, enriched) female student created a character that was eight years old and had no formal education. Her journal was full of phonetic spellings and incomplete sentences. There wasn't so much of that as to overdo it, but enough to help create that character very effectively. Another female student who chose China's "Great Leap Forward," used the Social Power theory which was one that no one else chose. I was very pleased to see some of the students trying something different. Finally, I had something new, a student who chose to be two characters. When she suggested her idea to me, I was skeptical but did not want to stifle her creativity and idea. I told her, "Let's give it a try and see." She created a journal by a girl whose culture was being eliminated. When that character was killed, one of the character's oppressors found it, and wrote in it from *his* perspective. Two different perspectives on the same event! Not only did this student put herself in the perspective of someone being oppressed, but she managed to assume the role of one of the oppressors. The results of this project were thrilling.

As part of the conclusion, I had each student present, very briefly, which event they chose, why, and what surprised them the most about what they learned from their research. Several points were brought up several times. The first was that the students invariably had no idea that this event had even occurred. I believe the project heightened their awareness of the world around them. Second, they were amazed at the brutality aroused by something that seemed potentially easy to address. And third, many of them simply stated how glad they had become that they live in the United States.

When the project concluded and the journals were done, I spread them out on a table anonymously, and asked each student to read three. As I had done in the past, I decided to add a

peer review element to their project grade. Not only did this allow the students more exposure to other incidents in the world, but I think with this group in particular, peer review is important. The class grades for this project were high. Experience has shown me that when enriched students like this are given specific directions, they are able to follow them and complete the assignments quite well. Therefore, a class average of 98% was not surprising.

The part that was enjoyable for me was seeing certain students being creative with the project and some of them choosing to go above and beyond the requirements. For example, some of the students know their students wouldn't have access to a computer or type writer, so their entire journal is hand-written. Other students know that their characters wouldn't even have access to paper so the journal entries are crammed onto as few sheets as possible. One student, whose character was killed, actually had his uncle shoot a hole through his journal with a .9 mm gun before turning it in.

I believe that it is projects like this that emphasize the concepts and ideas by past researchers like Gutherie and Renzuli. In Chapter Two, I highlighted ideas such as projects that could be individualized, allowed for independent work, “– projects, independent investigations, simulations, and dramatizations”. Renzulli (2000) said that we should expose students to varying styles of instruction so gifted students learn an appreciation for other styles (p.4). When I'm modifying assignments, this is what is foremost in my mind; not just what will they produce in the end, but what are these enriched students going to gain from *getting* to the end?

Finally, the last thing I introduced, as cited in Chapter 3, was a new assessment I created for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Students in this enriched class take a shorter version of



the summative assessment I give the regular curriculum students, but I present it as a quiz. This is so I can check for general understanding and comprehension. Though most of the students have a general understanding of the story, many have never read it in its original language before and it can prove to be difficult or confusing for some. That is why I use the regular curriculum's summative assessment as an enriched formative assessment. This assessment, the one I introduced in chapter three, is a more in-depth assessment of Charles Dickens and this particular work. As you saw in Chapter 3, this assessment provides autonomy or choice for the students. Anytime that can be done in any classroom, it's beneficial.

As it turned out, most students chose Topic 1. This option focused on theme. It had three parts: one, students had to take what they knew of Dickens' life, such as having to work in a factory at a young age, and speculate, or offer ideas about, possible themes for "A Christmas Carol." In the second part, they had to agree or disagree with ideas of themes that I provided. And finally, they had to research three modern-day philanthropists and explain what their motivations are or were. The students who chose this option did very well for the most part, though I was a little surprised at what some of their responses were. By that I mean I was surprised to see several students who did *not* think that *economic disparity* was a theme of the novel. The heading of this section is also titled *Support or Refute*. I am questioning my use of vocabulary in this case. If they don't know what disparity means, it would be hard to agree or disagree with it. I actually had several students ask me what *refute* means, so maybe some vocabulary adjustment is in order.

Topic 3, the topic that asked students to identify what literary period "A Christmas Carol" fit the best, was attempted by five students. They too did very well. The one thing that I

thought was surprising, though, was that no one chose Topic 2, discussing the story as a persuasive essay. In reviewing the option and how I worded it, I suspect that students perceived it as too much work. After years of trying to add choice and autonomy to assignments, I've noticed that even the enriched students scan the choices to see which one seems to require the least amount of work (they are eighth graders after all). Therefore, when I create assignments like this, I think it's very important to make them all appear to require roughly the same amount of work. That way the students can choose which assignment they feel they would do the best. This deserves some attention on my part and I will rewrite that portion of the assignment so each choice looks achievable. The class average for this project was a 98% as almost all the students met all of the requirements.

One of the things I've mentioned repeatedly is student autonomy. I firmly believe that giving students choices in their assignments produces better work. Even a little bit of choice makes a difference, to all students, but perhaps more so to the enriched and gifted. I started this with something as simple as giving two essay questions on a test and letting them choose one. Since then, I employ choice whenever I can. It removes the confines of a lot of assignments and it allows the students to show their best work. It seems to make students feel more invested in their work. The other thing I mentioned with this class of enriched students is peer review and correction. In the age of rubrics for class work, I believe students have gotten very good at meeting minimum requirements. Though I have used rubrics and even tiered assignments in the past, I felt like I was creating a minimum expectation, which was all they felt compelled to meet. With the assignments and projects where I utilize peer review, I give students the minimum requirements, but then allow my students to see what their peers have accomplished with them. I

have seen a gradual increase in the effort of many students after seeing their peers' work. I think that is valuable.

In asking myself, "*How do I take a regular English curriculum and enrich it to better challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students?*" I look at the projects, assignments, and assessments I used with this population. They didn't cost me or my district anything but time to create. Also, in almost every case, I'd consider the enrichments successful and in most cases, the students were directing their own learning. All it took to create these assignments was some general understanding of the literature about gifted students and the willingness to use it in developing enhanced curriculum. I feel successful in the projects I created and used because I know students got more out of them than they would have doing *more* work instead of *different* work. In my opinion, no number of worksheets or extra chapters can replace the personal discovery of a short story that a student really likes. As Guthrie stated in 2003, "(Enrichment) activities provide gifted children with the opportunities to explore topics and issues from regular curriculum in greater breadth and depth, to engage in collaborative or independent inquiry that cultivates their problem-solving abilities, research skills, and creativity, and inspire their desire for excellence," (2003, p. 3).

## **Chapter Five**

Looking back on my question, "*How can I take an English curriculum and enrich it to better challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students?*" I find that, several things come to mind. First of all, what was my intent? When I first set out on this journey of creating an enriched curriculum

based on the regular one, my foremost goal was to create a curriculum that was *different* work, not *more* work.

I knew that I wanted to create something engaging, something different from what the other students in more standard English classes were doing, and something that the enriched students would find of value. The middle school English/Language Arts curriculum being what it is in the state of Minnesota - quite repetitive from grade six through grade eight- I knew that this class would have to follow an enrichment strategy, not an acceleration strategy. This meant I would be digging deeper and looking into the things we were already doing.

Since I started this project, I've taught the curriculum elements that I'm presenting here for five years now. I feel to a large extent that I have accomplished my goal fairly successfully. To be perfectly honest, I'm still a little nervous in the fall when these students enter my class. *Am I going to be able to challenge them? Will they see the same value in these assignments that I do? Will I successfully meet their needs?* These are all things that run through my mind when they walk through my door. At the end of the year, though, when I have my students fill out their year-end evaluations for the class, there will likely be comments like, *"I think we should spend more time on poetry,"* and, *"I really liked the novels we read."* But I think my favorite comment from the students is, *"I learned a lot more than I thought I would."* In my experience, coming from a middle-school student, that's not bad at all. I'll take it.

Almost everything I have read, for this project, and prior to beginning my curriculum, touched on two main areas: 1. Enriched and gifted students learn differently from other students, and 2. They need to be given the opportunity to do so. When I first read some of Joe Renzulli's

articles, most of what he said made sense. He generalized that gifted students prefer less structured kinds of learning experiences (2000). He also said that exposing students to varying styles of instruction would help them learn an appreciation for those styles. As I applied this, though, I found it to be true, but within assignments. What I mean is that I would give one assignment and students would approach it four or five different ways. That was fine but hard to manage. That's when I started coming up with assignments that had two or three choices pick from. It still gave them choice, but I could create standards for three instead of eight.

Some of the information and ideas I found especially helpful weren't just from Joseph Renzulli. When I first approached my administration with the idea for an enriched class (a class full of students who were high achievers in English) I was literally scoffed at, and told that that would be "tracking" and that "...we could never do something like that." William Guthrie's early articles, though, completely justified for me the need for such classes. His language is very succinct and to the point. *"...gifted and talented education is aimed not at advancing national or societal interests but at promoting individual gifted children's welfare, academically as well as socially and emotionally, not unlike special provisions for the mentally retarded or learning disabled."* (Guthrie, 2000 p.4) There is no doubt after reading Guthrie's work that enriched and accelerated classes should be offered and that they are, in fact, justifiable and defensible.

Finally, though by now the research is fairly old, articles by Weber (1999), Caine (1997), and Dalzell (1999) made me aware of the enriched and gifted students' affective needs as well. Depending on who a program identifies, teachers may wind up with a student who quietly works hard on his or her work, intent upon doing the best they can. Or, teachers may encounter a student who is truly gifted and very smart academically, but can't sit still, and needs to be

allowed to move around the room or even sit in the recycling bin to really focus. Depending on the program, two such students may be in the same class.

What these articles taught me, and very early on it proved true to my experience, was that just because these students are really smart, doesn't necessarily mean they're "good" students. To a teacher starting or branching out in the area of gifted education, that needs to be OK. In addition, Dalzell (1999) reminds us that in addition to all of this, these students are kids who are finding their place in school, in social circles, and vying for acceptance. As adolescents, they are also likely to challenge authority.

All of the articles I've read for this project have been helpful and informative. They've all served either to confirm what else I've read, help me question critically what I've read so I can make the material useful for me, or simply added to my knowledge base. The specific authors I mentioned, though, are the ones that stand out the most and had the biggest impact on my approach to this curriculum.

Would I create this curriculum the same way again? I'm not sure. As I look at how my curriculum has changed, by adjusting it, adding to it, or building on it, I see that it has changed as the students have changed. It's not the same curriculum I started with eight years ago, but seventh and eighth graders aren't the same as they were eight years ago either. As my students' needs have changed, the curriculum has had to reflect that. When I look at what I started with, it wasn't bad considering that many schools had nothing in place for their gifted students. But at the same time, it wouldn't be challenging enough for students now. So, I think the answer is yes,

I would do the same things again understanding that building a curriculum like this is going to be a work in progress.

Of the things I've discovered, and tried, over the past five years, there are a few elements that I think are important to creating this kind of curriculum. The things I think are the most impactful include the following:

First, try to allow autonomy. The more choice a teacher can give a student, the better. Even if it's just a small differentiation, it's still a choice and allows the student to be more invested in their work. Also, with gifted populations, they often think "outside the box" compared to other students. Even though the choices may not include exactly the way a student would choose to do it, allowing for autonomy allows gifted students to make a choice that is perhaps closest to what they would do alone. Finally, if a student asks to do something in a way that the teacher didn't offer, consider it. If the amount of work and the use and understanding of concepts isn't far off, allow it. The amount and quality of work may be better than what you expected.

Second, challenge them to see things from a different perspective. In my personal experience, some of the really gifted students, even at a young age, are so set in their ways and like to do things their own way. The assignment such as the one I included where the students were to write a journal from another person's perspective, makes them recognize and acknowledge that there is more than one way of seeing and doing things. That one assignment is the one that elicits the most "I had no idea..." responses. I think that's incredibly valuable and shows more than academic learning.

Third, and this goes hand in hand with the second, is pushing them out of their comfort zones. In many cases, this can be just as much of a challenge for gifted students as any of the most challenging assignments. In addition to the journal I mentioned, in their reading requirements I include non-fiction and reading from a genre they normally don't read. It is challenging for them, but the vindication for this over the past couple of years is comments like, "This used to be a genre I didn't read, but now it's not. I really like it." Yes sometimes it feels like I'm forcing them out of their comfort zones, but I think that it's important to the learning process.

My thought when starting this project was, *I want a teacher who has never taught enriched or gifted students to be able to pick this up and use it as a jumping off point for their curriculum.* Even if that teacher's school is going to invest in a pre-made "gifted" curriculum, there are some things teachers are going to have to know, and hopefully they'll find it here. This project was meant to be the kind of thing I wish I could have read before I started this process. That "burning" question- *"How can I take an English curriculum and enrich it to better challenge gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students?"* wasn't something I came up with for this project. It was something I asked myself when I was told I would be teaching an enriched class, but wasn't given a curriculum. Today I hope that this project can speak to a teacher in need, and give them the foundation on which to start building their own curriculum.



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