Increasing Student Engagement in Reading by Creating YouTube Videos

Sharon Green, Ed.M.
Coordinator of Instructional Services
Office of Academic Support
Niagara University
CCTL Conference – January 8, 2015

“Critical Literacy” (CRL 101) is a three-credit developmental reading/writing course at Niagara University; most students in the course are first-semester freshmen. The course includes a Book Project for 15% of the final grade. Each student reads one of these high-interest books, selected to promote enjoyment in reading while expanding background knowledge:

- Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (nonfiction)
- Beals, Melba Pattillo. *Warriors Don’t Cry* (nonfiction)
- Ung, Luong. *First They Killed My Father* (nonfiction)
- Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (fiction)

In Fall 2014, I piloted a new assignment in the Book Project: in small groups, students created YouTube videos. They wrote an interview (minimum two full pages) with people/characters from their book, and then filmed the interview for posting on YouTube. Groups debuted their videos in class.

The YouTube video is part of the Book Project, which includes:
- a meeting with the instructor to answer questions on the first half of the book (2%)
- a comprehension test on the book (5%)
- the YouTube video (8%)

The goals of this YouTube video assignment were:
- to increase student motivation to read an entire book
- to increase active engagement with the book
- to increase active learning as students consider which people/characters to interview and compose questions that reflect a close reading of the book
- to practice writing skills
- to appeal to students’ affinity for technology

After the making their YouTube video, students anonymously assessed the assignment.

- Did you complete your book? Yes – 31 No – 8
  - If you did not finish your book, about how much did you read?
    90% - 1  70% - 3  60% - 1  40% - 2  30% - 1
- Did you read your book more carefully because you would be creating a YouTube video on it? Yes – 17 No – 22
- As you prepared your YouTube video, did you skim or re-read any part(s) of your book? Yes – 29 No – 10
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Planned improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The typical challenges of group work were compounded when a few commuter students were unable to meet with their group on campus (one because of an unusual November snowstorm) or simply failed to meet with their group.</td>
<td>Emphasize the importance of working together. Devise a brief rubric asking group members to assess one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All groups used smart phones to record videos but some sat too far away, so videos were difficult to hear.</td>
<td>Enhance my directions to include suggestions on placement of camera, as well as voice, posture, and setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students felt that the time frame was too short and suggested more class time to prepare.</td>
<td>Introduce the assignment earlier so students have more time to complete it. Allot more class time to work on the script.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the anonymous assessment, seven students noted that making the video was awkward and uncomfortable.</td>
<td>Provide a sample script so students better understand the format. In addition to the directions on the syllabus, distribute a detailed explanation sheet. Include links to videos created by former students. In class, show a sample YouTube video created by former students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students didn't fully understand their classmates’ videos.</td>
<td>Before presenting their videos in class, ask each group to more thoroughly introduce their video with details about their book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some student comments:

“Working with another student was nice because all the work was evenly divided and if I had a question regarding the book, I could ask my partner.” (11 students)

“Creating the YouTube video helped me understand the characters’ emotions towards other characters, which gave us a better understanding of the book.” (10 students)

“Hard to coordinate such busy schedules.” (6 students)

“I thought working with a classmate whom I wasn’t familiar with was good. By collaborating on ideas, we went through our script together and made a friend in the process.” (4 students)

“It made me more aware and it made me feel better about reading the book.” (3 students)

“Making my YouTube video and writing my script was a form of review about the book. It was like a way for me to understand the characters through acting in the video.” (2 students)

“Writing the script was difficult at first but once we got an idea, questions and responses flew right out.”

“It was hard to get everyone together so we did a lot on our own. I liked that we had the freedom to pick characters and how to use them.”

“Making the script was fun. It gave us a chance to really dig deep into the characters and try to express their emotions as best as possible.”

“I didn’t know what kind of questions to write; that was the hardest part. But I was able to be in my character’s shoes when making the video.”

“Creating the video helped me to understand possible outcomes of the situations the characters faced.”
“It allowed me to see more of other people’s interpretations of the book.”

“We learned more about our book by re-reading sections to make sure they were correct in our script.”

“It was helpful to study for the book test because it forced us to review.”

“Dress up to resemble the characters.”

“Make a higher percentage towards final grade for more motivation.”

“Interviews should be longer and require more depth.”

Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average grade on Book Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2014</strong></td>
<td><strong>83.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(with YouTube assignment)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>