

Tips for teachers

EXERCISES ON THE BACK

Hey teachers,

It's that month of the year when teenagers start thinking about ghosts and ghouls, tricks and treats, haunted houses and hay rides. So VOX teens came up with a theme to match: "VOX-Files: Investigations into the supernatural, the strange and the downright scary." The end result is a mixture of mischief and mayhem, but features a lot of great writing.

Barry Langer's "Who You Gonna Call: An Interview with Real-Life Ghostbuster Patrick Burns" is not only a fascinating read about a Lawrenceville-based ghost hunter, but also a professionally written personal profile that asks great questions and gathers some unexpected responses. Other great stories following the VOX-Files theme include Kai Mosley's personal essay, "Why I Don't Celebrate Halloween" (page 10), Allison McWaters' story about how she became a witch in "Practical Magick" (page 7), and Raisa Habersham's encounter with psychic readers in "All Psyched Up" (page 11). The October issue of VOX isn't just about things that go bump in the night. Amber Middlebrooks recounts her struggle to find employment in "My Roller Coaster Ride of Finding My First Job" (page 3), Idrees Syed discusses how he saw a different side of life in his travelogue "Halfway Around the World" (page 4), and Ricky Riley delivers the low down on the impact of "Joshua's Law" in the reported feature "License to Drive" (page 12).

The back page offers several ideas on how to use VOX in your classroom. Included with each suggested lesson are the Core Quality Curriculum Language Arts Skills identified by VOX staff.

TRICK OR TREAT MONTH VOL. 14 ISSUE 2

VOX
OCTOBER 2006
THE VOICE OF OUR GENERATION

VOX-FILES

Investigating the supernatural,
the strange and the downright scary

An interview with a real life
Ghost Hunter

Finding a First Job
can be a real roller coaster ride

License to Drive:
New law requires more teen training

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ATLANTA'S ONLY CITYWIDE NEWSPAPER CREATED BY AND ABOUT TEENAGERS

SUBMISSIONS

Please send any exceptional stories/work resulting from Tips for Teachers exercises to VOX, 145 Nassau St., Suite A, Atlanta, GA 30303 or at vox@voxrox.org for potential publication in the newspaper. Include the student's name, school and contact information (including e-mail address) for verification. Last spring, we received more than 100 essays and poems for VOX's annual Readers' Contest — many through our teacher network — and several students won prizes and had their creative works published in the newspaper.

WHO YOU GONNA TALK TO?

Interviewing

QCC Skills: 1,2,3,4,7,8,9,11,15,16,17,18,22,23,24,25

Barry Langer's Q&A-style personal profile titled "Who You Gonna Call? An Interview with Real-Life Ghost-buster Patrick Burns" (page 8) is an excellent example of what it takes to get information from a first-hand, primary source. Interviewing skills aren't just useful for reporters and writers, but also a diverse array of professions ranging from police officers to doctors. In these jobs it's critical to ask the right questions, and ask them well.

For this exercise, ask your students to read the story, pair up with each other, and do a Q&A interview and written report. After reading the story in VOX, discuss what makes good questions — namely ones that are relevant to the interviewee and open-ended so that the interviewee talks extensively on a subject.

Asking the question "Why?" is an excellent tool that gets novice reporters beyond just the basic facts. For instance, asking "What's your favorite color?" produces a one-word response with little impact. But asking "What's your favorite color, and why?" lets the interviewer discover a lot more about the person they're interviewing.

The assignment for the class is to find out something unusual or interesting about their Q&A partner — something that no one in the class may know. Have the partners write some preliminary questions to ask, and then interview each other for 15 minutes to find the unusual/interesting story within. Instruct them that they must write down complete sentences or "quotes" — not just a few jotted down facts or notes — from the interviewee in similar fashion to the VOX story. When they finish, ask them to write a short Q&A — five of the best questions and answers should be plenty — in story form.

Ask for volunteers to read their Q&As to the class and then follow-up each



with a discussion of what the best questions and answers were. Give extra credit to the students who've uncovered the most unusual/interesting stories and consider sending the best ones to VOX for potential publication.

SUPERSTITIONS

Research & Editorial Writing

QCC Skills: 1,2,4,5,6,7,8,11,13,14,15,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,25

Brittany Briscoe's editorial "Superstitions Are Silly" (page 6) recounts the many superstitions and old wives' tales her family and friends believe that she thinks are downright ridiculous. She postulates where these superstitions come from, and in the case of "Bloody Mary" gets to the bottom of the fact that it's not about Queen Mary I, but rather a long-dead witch (thanks to myth-busting Web site Snopes.com).

Have your students read Brittany's story and then ask them each to come up with a superstition they'd like to research and explain. (For those who can't come up with a superstition on their own, supply them with some examples such as "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" or "if you break a mirror, you get

seven years of bad luck.") Instruct them on where they can find the information — the Web, reference books, etc. — and have them take notes on what they find.

Remind them that they need to confirm their findings with at least three sources because some of these superstition's origins are not definitively known. This is also the perfect time to reinforce that Web sites aren't always trustworthy — and give them help in learning to identify which ones are reliable (Snopes.com, because its sources are checked multiple times) and which ones aren't (Wikipedia.com, because any person, even someone not knowledgeable about a subject, can contribute).

Once they're done, ask them each to write an editorial/opinion piece about whether or not people should believe in the superstition based on a mixture of their personal opinions and their research. The point is that the best opinion or argument pieces are by good research, and are not just off-the-top-of-your-head rants.

After reviewing your students' work, have the best editorials read aloud and reward them with extra credit. VOX would be interested in publishing exceptional editorials resulting from this exercise on our Web site, so please send them in!

LETTER WRITING

QCC Skills: 1,2,7,15,17,18,19,22

Have your students read at least one story in VOX and then craft a letter — using the appropriate techniques — about what they thought about the article to the writer. Send in the letters to VOX (see submission information on the first page) and we'll publish the best ones every month.

POETRY WRITING

QCC Skills: 6,17,19

VOX routinely features "The Wall," a special page where readers can share their poems and original artwork. Have your students each write a poem and submit it to VOX (see submission information on the first page). Again, we'll publish the best ones every month.