



Introduction

Welcome Educators: On StageofLife.com, you will find free lesson plans and real-world writing prompts. These plans and prompts are there to help you introduce blogging and stronger essay writing to your students. Check back often - these pages are regularly updated with new material and ideas. Don't forget to tell your students about our free, national, monthly writing contest - which get teens and students writing and blogging about hard-hitting issues, like health, the environment, marriage, and bullying (to name a few).

Our door at Stage of Life is always open: if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, feel free to contact us!

What is blogging?

Blogging is an incredibly powerful tool. It is an immediate, responsive, and community-driven channel that gives students' writing a voice and forum outside of the classroom. In fact, a key component in how the founders of Stage of Life designed this portal was to provide teachers a no-cost, interactive, and simple platform through which a writing curriculum centered on blogging could be used.

To us, blogging is... Personal reflections. Mini-memoirs. Essays. But mostly... blogs are stories: Stories about the wisdom, lessons, joys, and sorrows of everyday life. And as we all know, everyone has a story to tell.

When we share our stories with others, we realize how connected we really are. We can learn from each other, challenge each other, question each other, and receive feedback about our life stories.

That is what our Stage of Life philosophy is all about: Sharing stories about life.

Combat Texting: None of this could be more relevant now as students struggle to find a venue through which to express themselves in more than the four sentence limit on Facebook, a 140 character limit on Twitter, or the bane of many Language Arts instructors... mobile texting's influence on student writing.

Read how SocialTimes.com reported on our efforts to combat mobile texting.

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Free Resource: The possibilities for educational experiences in our blog are limitless. Our mission is to provide you a free and reliable resource to encourage students to get their writing out of the classroom and into the real world.

Take your time and review the lesson plans on how to incorporate blogging into your writing curriculum as we all work together on the campaign of getting students to write more (not less) outside of the classroom.

Feel free to [Contact Us](#) with your comments and suggestions.

Blogging Lesson #1: The Basics

What Are the Basics of Blogging on Stage of Life?

At the heart of our site is writing, storytelling, sharing personal essays, blogging, submitting essay contests, posing questions, and receiving feedback (and hopefully some answers) to some of our most important life questions.

Let's take a look at each of these individual writing opportunities:

1. Our Monthly Student Writing Contests

Looking for a good opportunity to get your high school and college students thinking about important/intelligent questions, practice essay writing, and posting essays in a national online forum? Each month Stage of Life features a new essay contest. Essay topics, rules, and directions are posted on our site. Winners of the essay contests are often times asked to become "Featured Bloggers" for the site.

2. Blogging

Every student can utilize Stage of Life to post personal essays and stories about their life. Each month we will have writing suggestions (just check the home page). Students can post their own personal essays about the monthly topics suggested, or they can post about other important topics in their lives. If a student is particularly talented or passionate about blogging for the site, they may be invited to become a "featured blogger."

But let's ask an important question first...Why should students blog?

Read this article by Ali Hale about reasons to blog:

"Students often times feel less intimidated by blogging than they do "journal assignments". If you have access to computers, students can actually do their journaling in blogging format. The great thing about Stage of Life is their blogging can be as formal or informal as you want it to be. Every post/essay submitted to this site will be archived in the student's profile, thus becoming an online journal of sorts, BUT in this journal, they will be posting in a real national forum where they can receive feedback about their work."

3. Posting questions

Students can utilize Stage of Life to ask questions about any stage of life. If a high school student has a question about searching for the perfect college, he/she can post that in the college stage and get a response from a college student's perspective.

This feature can become an online discussion web for your class.

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4. Responding to other posts

Each of the ten stages of life have “Featured Bloggers” who post anywhere from once every few months to several times a month. Students can read posts in any stage of life and write responses to these posts. These responses can be quick-writes or fully developed personal essays. The goal is to get them reading and responding to writing. This also creates discussion webs and allows the student to see what other people are writing about in “the real world” and to respond directly to the writers.

5. Profile page

When you or your students join StageofLife.com, your Profile page will become your online “life journal.” Every time you upload a new story, that essay will be stored on StageofLife.com and an archived link for each story/essay will appear on your Profile page. This will allow you easy access to all of your essays. Stage of Life will become your online life blog!



Blogging Lesson #2: Values & Beliefs

Share a story about your values and beliefs

Ask your students these questions (in this order) and take one or two class volunteers to share as you walk through the series:

1. “What do you value the most in your life, and why?”
2. “In terms of hours spent in a day, what do you spend the most time doing?”
3. “Now think about these two questions together... does ‘what you value most in your life’ match with what ‘you’re spending the most time on?’ Why or Why Not?”
4. “Finally, thinking about the value of time and the value of your beliefs, what do you think needs to change in order to prioritize your values so you can be a success in life? How will you do this?”

Writing Assignment/Homework

As the instructor, post this question (or your own version of it) to Stage of Life (as one post) and give it your own unique headline. Ask your class to find your Question (which will really be a series of questions) and to then comment to your post with their responses.

You'll instantly start a discussion web for your entire class under your original post. You'll be able to see each person's individual response. Encourage your students to comment on each other's posts as well. The entire web dialogue will be contained in one string.



Blogging Lesson #3: Reflection and Wisdom

No one ever told me...

Students are reflective by nature... when they have time to be. But thanks to busy schedules and late nights doing homework, most may not realize that they have important advice inside their heads that they don't know even exists.

For instance, ask your students to think about the answer to the following question: “If there was one thing about high school (or college) that I wish somebody would have told me, it was that _____.”

Based on the age/grade of the students, modify this question to suite your class. For example, if you are working with a 9th grade class, you could alter the question to reflect back on middle school or junior high.

Take a few volunteers from class to share their stories. Ask them for the reasons, experiences, or background that inspired the advice/answer to the question.

Writing Assignment/Homework

1. Post this question on Stage of Life and ask your students to “comment” on it so their responses are contained within one dialogue string under your original post. In this manner, you'll see all of individual pieces of advice from your class under you original post.

OR...

2. Make this a larger story opportunity and ask your students to create their own story post on Stage of Life about the advice they would give to answer this question.

Remember to ask your students to:

- Be specific and give concrete details,
- Come up with a creative headline to summarize the story/advice when they create their own story posting on the site, and
- Most importantly, keep in mind that the purpose of this exercise is that another student reading their post could personally benefit from the wisdom or experience that they share. The possibility of sharing the advice in a national venue like Stage of Life will certainly help another student at some future date.

As a wrap-up over the next day, perform an in-class discussion about some of the various posts/ advice.



Blogging Lesson #4: Life Stage Interview

I want answers to...

As a spring board from the previous lesson, students are not only reflective and good at giving advice, but they are also extremely curious.

FACT: During Stage of Life's start-up phase, the website saw thousands of student visitors spend an equal amount of time in their “home stage” (ex: high school), as they did in future life stages. It was an interesting trend. For instance, nearly every high school student peeks ahead into the College, On My Own, and/or Having a Baby stages simply because those are life milestones on the radar.

With this curiosity in mind (and the ability to use Stage of Life as a crystal ball into the future), ask your class to...

Write down two questions about life after high school (or college) that they really want the answers to. You may want to write the ten stages of life on the board to help spur their thinking process about the future (look at our menu running across the top of the website to help with the stage of life milestones).

Writing Assignment/Homework

1. Ask your students to write down the names of two or more people that they know from their circle of friends, family, church, or community who might be able to answer their two questions AND are in a DIFFERENT STAGE OF LIFE from the student (ex: an older sister, a grandparent, etc.).
2. Students must then conduct personal interviews with the “experts” they’ve identified: either in-person, by phone, email, or Stage of Life*. Again, these interview candidates must be in a different stage of life from your students.
3. Your students must then write up two separate summaries of the two interviews. These summaries should include key thoughts as to what they learned through the process of each interview (making sure to include their questions and their interviewee’s responses).
4. As a final step, the students should then post the summary on Stage of Life. The catch to this last part is that they should post their interview story in the stage of life that pertained to their question and the interviewee. For instance, if the student interviewed an older sister who is about to get married, the post should be posted in the “Wedding” stage. Encourage your students to craft a unique headline that summarizes the advice given to them for each story.

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For in-class follow-up, ask the students to present or share in sm interview experiences, responses, lessons learned, etc.

*A variation of this lesson would be to ask your students to post the question on Stage of Life in the stage of life to which it applies, and then email the link to their interview contact asking them to comment on their question to answer it. The student and the interviewee can then exchange responses through the post and comment process.



Blogging Lesson #5: Food and Health

Our relationship with food...

Young people are frustrated by the obesity program in America. To start a dialogue on this topic, Stage of Life asked this question during its July 2010 writing contest... “Do we have an obligation to take better care of ourselves by making changes in the way we eat and/or buy and consume food?”

Students from all 50 states visited the contest page, and scores of teens submitted their essays. You can visit the writing contest page to read the essays from winner and finalists, but what we realized is that this conversation shouldn't end with the writing contest.

When popular TV shows like NBC's *Biggest Loser* pull in millions of viewers, books like Michael Pollan's *Food Rules* fly off the shelves, and independent film documentaries like *Food, Inc.* and *Super Size Me* push the conversation of America's unhealthy relationship with food into the mainstream consciousness, we know we have an obligation to continue the conversation through our blogging lesson plan initiative.

Start a discussion with your class centered on this question...

Food and the traditions around food play an incredibly important role in our lives. Read almost any play, short story, or novel and there will be key sections that deal with food. Oliver Twist's famous line, “Please, sir, may I have some more?” is a perfect example. Keeping this literary point of view in mind, consider the following lesson to get your students writing and thinking about their relationship to food.

Writing Assignment/Homework

1. Ask your students to chronicle what they eat for each meal for a week. While doing this, ask them to write down observations about how their family interacts with food too. For instance, does Dad skip breakfast before work? Are siblings eating the same meal for dinner or is “everyone on their own?” Once the weekly menu has been recorded, ask your students to self-evaluate and circle or highlight the meals they consider “unhealthy.”
2. Throughout the week, as they are recording their specific, daily meals and snacks, ask your students to start a blog thread on Stage of Life that addresses their specific family traditions centered on food. For instance, they could write a story about food the family eats during particular holidays, going into detail by describing the process of how their mother, grandmother, father, or other family member prepares the meal. Or they could submit an essay about the meal they pick each year for their birthday, why they pick it, who makes it and how it makes them feel. Or maybe there's a regional dish one of their parents prepares during a particular time of year... For instance, our curriculum consultant, Rebecca, grew up eating blue crabs from Baltimore steamed by her father and seasoned with Old Bay every summer. Or ask them to write



an essay that describes the perfect family meal. Where would it be?
would the conversation at the table be about?

The purpose of this section of the homework assignment is to get students thinking about family traditions and times when food plays an integral and central role... versus the daily, on-the-go, fast-food-me-now meals that many teens consume as they juggle school work, jobs, and extracurricular activities.

As a supplemental part of the essays being written over the week, ask students to comment on their classmates' Stage of Life food blogs. Students will find both commonalities and exciting differences among friends in the class as discussions about food traditions are exchanged via the blog threads.

3. With the blogs and essays written and the weekly menu completed, set aside time to watch either *Super Size Me* or *Food, Inc.* in class (you may substitute other films that center around food based on how you customize this lesson).

4. As the last assignment, have the students write a reaction paper (in-class or additional homework) that incorporates all of the pieces of this lesson: Their weekly meal log; the family food traditions blogs and essays; comments from classmates during discussions or from the blog threads; and film insights from *Super Size Me* or *Food, Inc.*

The reaction paper should address larger, thematic questions from the lesson, i.e. what was the big, take-away “ah-ha” moment from this experience? What did you learn about yourself and the way you live or would like to live? What changes will you make in how you interact with food? And getting back to our original question... “Do we have an obligation to take better care of ourselves by making changes in the way we eat and/or buy and consume food?”

Blogging Lesson #6: Heroes

What is a Hero? Who is Your Hero?

Discussions about “heroes” are constant themes across history and literature texts. Within every novel, memoir, or history lesson, heroes emerge to perform great deeds or challenge our view of the world.

But wait... Have you ever stopped to wonder, “What is a hero?” What characteristics define a hero? Is there a universal definition, or are heroes defined by the situation or context that made them a hero?

This lesson plan is designed to integrate into a variety of History or English units as teachers pose a surprisingly complex question in the simplest of terms, “What is a Hero?”

Objective

Students will be able to define “hero” and examine heroes in their own lives.

Materials

Stage of Life's Hero List for “Hero Walk” Activity; MyHero.com (for reference and additional ideas/resources); Note cards

Anticipatory Set

Answer these questions and perform the following pre-discussion activities:

1. Independent: Ask each student independently define the word “hero” on a note card. Leave this question as open-ended as possible. As a part of this, ask them to write down the specific characteristics of a hero.
2. Partner Share: Pair students up to share with a partner for 2-3 minutes.

Activities

Hero Walk Group Activity: Have the entire class stand up and separate into two groups with each group standing across from each other on opposite sides of the room (you'll need to clear desks for this activity). Using the Stage of Life Hero List, select various groups, individuals, or relationships from the list and read them to the class. If your students feel that the name you read is a “hero,” they should cross the room to the other side. This activity gets students to physically commit to applying their hero definition to the names read from the Hero List (which was compiled from over 200 hero essays during Stage of Life's Hero Writing Contest in September 2010).



Tip: You can be generic in your selection of certain heroes from the list. For example, “Is your boyfriend or girlfriend a hero?” or “Is a US Marine a hero?” in addition to more specific, “Is Lady Gaga a hero?”

NOTE: The Hero Walk can also be done by asking your students to simply stand or sit at their desks during the reading of the list. For those that feel a person named is a hero, they should stand.

Class Discussion

After students have taken their seats, lead your class in a discussion asking questions such as...

1. Based on this activity, would you change your definition of hero from your note card?
2. If so, what would you change?
3. Which heroes from the list were the most controversial?
4. However, which names of heroes did we have the most in common? For instance, nearly the entire class walked across the room when I read the name _____ and _____. Why?

Class Definition

Next, write the word “hero” on the board.

With the last question from the class discussion still fresh, now ask the class to list characteristics of a hero upon which everyone seems to agree and begin writing that characteristic/trait list on the board.

To Do: Pass around a second note card to your students and ask them to copy the class-generated list of “hero characteristics” from the board.

Tip: Reference names from the Hero List that the entire class seemed to agree on as a hero and ask for specific traits, characteristics, or deeds which make that person from the list a hero.

Closure

Moving away from class discussion and back to lecture mode...

Reflection: With both the individually generated definition and now the class-generated hero characteristic definition, ask your students to do the following:

1. Read both note cards silently to themselves.
2. Arrive at whom, specifically, they would name as a “Hero” based on the two definitions.
3. Have the students write the names of those two heroes at the top of the specific note cards, i.e. based on the individual definition created at the beginning of the lesson, who fits that specific definition? Likewise, who fits the agreed-upon class definition? Are the same person?



Homework

Ask your students to share a story or compose a hero essay about one of the heroes named on their note cards using the “Share a Story” link on StageofLife.com. This homework assignment may be tailored by the instructor with options including ideas like...

1. Compare and Contrast: Write an essay comparing and contrasting the two heroes that came out of the activity. For example... Real Life versus Celebrity Heroes.
2. Transformation: Write an essay discussing how your views on “what is a hero” may or may not have changed based on the group activity and discussion.

Follow-Up

1. Quaker Shares: After the homework assignment is complete, bring the class together later in the week to read aloud select essays.
2. Other options: Peer editing sessions can be used before posting essays to Stage of Life.
3. Resources: Visit MyHero.com for additional resources on Heroes.
4. Contextual Tie-In: The above lesson can be incorporated as an activity into virtually every novel or history lesson, esp. if there is a strong “hero” theme in the unit text (or anti-hero theme). While this lesson can be very engaging and fun as a stand-alone activity, using it as a bridge to discuss a larger text and themes will be quite rewarding.



Blogging Lesson #7: Teen Stress

Writing about Teen Stress

Stress... the bane of both teacher and student. Teens and their instructors witness examples of classroom stress and negative coping mechanisms almost every day. From heads down on desks to absenteeism, the effects of stress manifest itself for all to see, causing disruptions for both students and teachers.

Even in the stories we read in the classroom, we can find examples of teen stress and examine its negative impact on the characters. Look at Holden Caulfield or Hamlet. Both of these literary characters deal with stress in very destructive manners. Holden emotionally and physically breaks down by the end of the novel and Hamlet... well... need we say more?

This blogging lesson plan is designed to give students a positive outlet to release some of their stress through the process of writing and blogging. Teachers may also take this lesson a step further by asking the students to compare the stresses they face on a day-to-day basis with those of the characters they are reading about in class. Are they similar? What's different? What coping mechanisms are used by both the real teen and the literary one?

Objective

Students will be able to name a stress in their life, define it, examine it and process it through writing.

Materials

StageofLife.com's Teen Stress List; LearntobeHealthy.org's "Face the Music" eLearning Mental Health Activity Kit for Teens (for reference and additional ideas/resources); Note Cards/Paper

Anticipatory Set

Answer these questions and perform the following pre-discussion activities.

Independent: Two parts for this first section:

1. Ask each student to write down a stress in their lives. Big or small. Let the students know that you will not be collecting this particular paper or note card and that they can be as honest or as open as they wish. Students do not need to write more than one sentence for this part. They should simply name their stress.
2. After everyone has written down their particular stress, ask the students to then write down the effects this stress is causing in their lives. They have one or multiple effects to write down based on the stress they are experiencing. Remind the students that stress manifests itself physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.
3. Yes/No Poll—Raising Hands: At this time, at the teacher's discretion, ask the students yes/no questions to get them thinking about how the act of writing is affecting their current stress level. Did it feel good to name their stress? For how many of them is this the first time they are really



taking time to think about this stress? How many of them think that unique and no one else in the room or school is dealing with it? How common but it's still affecting them? Etc.

Teen Stress Group Activity

Using the Teen Stress List, go through each teen stress and ask your students to stand up if they personally feel stressed by that same list item. Ask them to sit down between stress listings. The questions would sound something like this:

- Are you stressed about school? (then get more specific per the list)
- Are you stressed about grades?
- Are you stressed about homework?
- Are you stressed about English class? (wait for laugh—see who stands up)
- Are you stressed about college?
- Are you stressed about relationships?
- Are you stressed about family?
- Are you stressed about friends?
- Are you stressed about parents?
- Are you stressed about drama?
- Etc.

Class Discussion

After students have all sat back down, lead your class in a discussion asking questions such as...

1. Based on this activity, do you feel less alone in the stress you wrote on your card?
2. Which stresses seemed the most common?
3. Which stresses caused the most reaction from the class after I read it? Why?
4. Etc.

Class Definition

Next, write the word “stress” on the board. With the questions from the class discussion still fresh, but without asking the students to specifically name their personal stress, ask them to instead share with the class some of the effects of stress that they wrote down on their paper/note card (the second part of the anticipatory set).

To Do: Pass around a second note card or piece of paper to your students and ask them to copy the class-generated list of stress effects from the board.

Contextual Tie-In Discussion: At this point, write the name of a character from the novel, story, or poem, the students are studying in class. Lead the class in a Q&A discussion about this character, asking the students to both name stresses that the character faces and the effects of the stress on the character. What does he/she do under stress? How does stress affect his/her behavior and relationships within the story? Were the outcomes positive or negative? (There is such a thing as good stress.) Encourage your students to take notes during this discussion.

Closure

Moving away from class discussion and back to lecture mode...

Reflection: Ask your students to review their note card with the individually named stress and its personal effects. Then ask them to review the list of stress effects generated by the class that they wrote down on the second note card. Finally, ask them to reflect upon the discussion in which they related the list of stress effects that they experience in their lives to that of the character in the book they're currently studying. This reflection will play a part in their homework...

Homework

With the class activities top of mind, ask your students to go home and write about their stress (or an alternative from the Teen Stress List) in a more narrative or personal essay format.

The essay's construct and format is up to the individual teacher, but the students should incorporate elements from the class discussion and personal reflection into the piece, i.e. they should clearly name the stress, reference the effects of this stress, how they are coping with it, how it's affecting relationships around them, if they are alone in feeling this stress (or not), etc. They should be creative and use authentic voice for their essays.

Encourage your students to be as specific as possible, and for those teens that want to explore the blogging/memoir format, students may share their story/essay using the green "Share a Story" link on StageofLife.com.

Their essay may help another teen going through the same thing that happens to read their essay on StageofLife.com and/or they may find posts popping up on their story from readers who want to respond to their stress essay.

This is the essence of the blogging format... the opportunity to help and/or inspire others through your words and interactive feedback from readers.

Follow-Up

1. Quaker Shares: After the homework assignment is complete, bring the class together later in the week to read aloud select essays (for those students that are comfortable).
2. Resources: If the classroom has web access and a projector (or ask students to explore it at home), consider playing the free MyStress Activity (Activity 4) from LearntobeHealthy.org's Face the Music eLearning Kit©.
3. Full Closure: After the essays have been turned in, added to StageofLife.com, discussed, shared and otherwise fully reviewed, ask the class to share the journey they took during this lesson plan. Did it help? Do they feel less stressed after writing and sharing? If yes, how so?