

Research Writing I

by Elissa Knight

Teaching the writing workshop that incorporated the real life issue of violence to upper classmen was one of the highlights of my teaching career to date. Having students journal and complete written projects about their own lives, opened them up to sharing their personal stories and quickly built relationships in the classroom. After the first ten weeks together, it had become clear that many of them were coping with some very serious issues, namely violence and loss and wanted to express their thoughts. So, I introduced the idea of the unit, gave them the survey (below) and slowly warmed them up to the possibility of bringing in an outside expert to talk to them about violence. The nature of the topic generated an innate motivation to participate in the discussions and invest in the writing assignment about their experiences. Their piece on loss and violence joined the other works in their portfolio, a personal collection of writings that ranged from 25 to 50 typed pages, depending on the student. In regards to violence, it is difficult to measure exactly how the unit impacted their thoughts about it. But, it is clear that many of them were dealing with being the victim (even collaterally) of violence. The unit offered a forum for them to talk about their experiences and their future. In the end, the majority of students graduated with their high school diploma, and a portfolio of work they were proud of.