Reconceptualizing the Research Paper

Subject Areas: English/Language Arts, Social Studies and Science

Grade Level: 6 – 12 (ages 11-18)

Time: At least three 45-minute class periods; time outside of class as necessary

Lesson Objective:
Students will be better able to organize and write a research paper using a variety of sources.

Common Core State Standards¹:
Writing Standards for Grades 6-12 in English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Standard 5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
Standard 6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
Standard 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
Standard 8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Overview:
The ability to organize and use information from multiple sources, evaluate the information collected and write research papers are challenging but important tasks for students.

Use the Research Paper template (Webspiration Classroom™ Starter>Starter Docs>English Language Arts>Research Paper) as a tool to help make the process easier for your students. Webspiration™’s tools will enable students to collaboratively brainstorm, research and connect ideas, build understanding, create knowledge and develop their research paper.
Preparation:

• This lesson requires Internet access and the Webspiration Classroom™ software application published by Inspiration® Software, Inc. It can be accessed by visiting <http://www.webspirationclassroom.com>.

• Access to library resources would also be helpful for student research.

Lesson:

1. Explain that having a system for organizing a research paper is essential and that this visual organizer is one excellent system for making the process easier.

2. Have students choose a general topic to begin researching and record the topic in the space provided. As they uncover good sources in print or online, they should record the bibliographic information on a separate numbered symbol. If they have more than five sources, students can add additional symbols. Students should be encouraged to use a variety of sources, including online databases.

3. If students need help preparing sources, there are many free resources available online: they can search for “citation maker.” Students should also know that they can hyperlink web resources to the organizer using the Hyperlink tool, or by simply inserting URLs (web addresses) in the document. Ideally students should have access to a complete style guide such as the one produced by the Modern Language Association.

4. As students delve deeper into the research process, they should formulate questions and answers about the nature of their topic, with a goal of defining a working thesis statement. Explain to them that a thesis statement is normally one sentence that states what one will attempt to argue in the paper. Explain that it is called a “working” thesis statement, because it may change as students conduct their research.

5. Before taking notes, students should obtain feedback from the teacher and their peers on their topic and thesis using the collaboration tools. Documents can be shared with others using the Collaborate Tab. The Comment Tab can be used to comment on the document, or the Chat Tab can be used, if it is turned on at your school, to discuss ideas in real time.

6. Students can begin to take notes in the Notes section at the bottom of the document even before they have written a thesis statement. Show students the Research Paper Example template so they see the kind of finished diagram they will be creating: Webspiration Classroom™ Starter>Open>Examples>English Language Arts>Research Paper Example. Explain the following system to the students for taking and organizing notes:

   a. Put each piece of information in a different symbol by first typing a descriptive heading.
   b. Below it put the source # from the Sources section at the top of the Organizer and page # if it is a book or paragraph # if it is a web site.
   c. Add a note to record information in your own words (paraphrase), or select quotations if they significantly strengthen your thesis.
   d. When students finish taking notes, they can move the similar ideas together. Then they can arrange them in order and link them.
e. If a topic has subtopics connected to it, students can use the **Subtopic Quick Control** in the upper-right corner to show or hide the subtopics.

f. Students can go to **Outline View** to finish organizing.

7. It is very important to check student progress as they undertake the multi-step process of writing a research paper. For example, students should obtain feedback on their notes and outline from the teacher and their peers using the collaboration tools explained above.

8. After students have organized their work in outline form, they can download their projects to Inspiration® or a word processor, or transfer it to a Google Doc to complete their papers.

**Adaptations / Extensions:**

- Students can make presentations to the class using either the **Diagram** or **Outline View**. Subtopics can be hidden or viewed using the **Subtopic Quick Control** in the upper-right corner of **Symbols** with subtopics (or in the left margin in **Outline View**).

- Rather than complete an entire research paper, students could submit a completed diagram including notes arranged in a web or a completed outline.

- This lesson can be used in any content area that requires students to write papers.