

Time Capsule

A "Create-a-Character" Story-Writing Activity

With modifications to make it age-appropriate, this activity works as an effective tool to help students ranging from second graders to adults to better understand how to develop a distinctive character:

1. Explain to the students what a Time Capsule is.
2. Explain that students are going to create a Time Capsule for themselves. This might be an actual activity where they bring objects from home to place in a shoebox, or a paper activity where they simply create a list of objects. Ask students to select 10-20 items that reveal their personality and lifestyle. These might include a family photograph, a pet toy, a sports trophy, or a t-shirt from a favorite vacation spot.
3. Encourage students to be specific: don't just say "my favorite book," list the title of the book. For paper lists, I also tell students they can break two of the "laws of science": they can pretend that their favorite food won't get moldy over time, and they can shrink down oversized objects to fit. But, I also warn them they can't use the Time Capsule as a way to get rid of a pesky sibling for 100 years!
4. Make sure the student has not written their name on their paper or in their shoebox. Redistribute the Time Capsules randomly around the room. Encourage students to avoid guessing whose Time Capsule they now hold.
5. Ask students to create a completely new character based on the contents of the anonymous Time Capsule they now hold. The aim is not to re-create the real person who created the Time Capsule. The goal is to be as creative as possible in inventing a new character or story inspired by the Time Capsule contents. If a dog toy is in the Time Capsule, they might create a dog character. If there's a CD, maybe their character is an "American Idol" wannabe!
6. Once students have created a new character from the Time Capsule, invite them to share by reading aloud. Then have them return the Time Capsule (and their character description/story) to the Time Capsule owner. Students love to read the stories/descriptions their friends have generated using their objects!