

Creativity in the English Classroom:
Implementing Unique Instructional
Approaches to Foster Inquiry

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Presentation Overview

- Introduction to Creativity and Creative Problem Solving
- Embedding Creativity into English Instruction
 - Creative Problem Solving in an AP English Class
 - A Spin on the Traditional Research Paper
 - A Service Learning Approach to Teacher Preparation
- Making Connections
- Questions?

Sparking Creativity

Writing Warm-up:

Take 3 minutes to brainstorm and record a list of any and all problems, questions, or concerns that you have as a teacher. This could be specific to the ELA discipline, your particular classroom or school, or to the teaching profession more broadly.

Why Creativity and Creative Problem Solving?

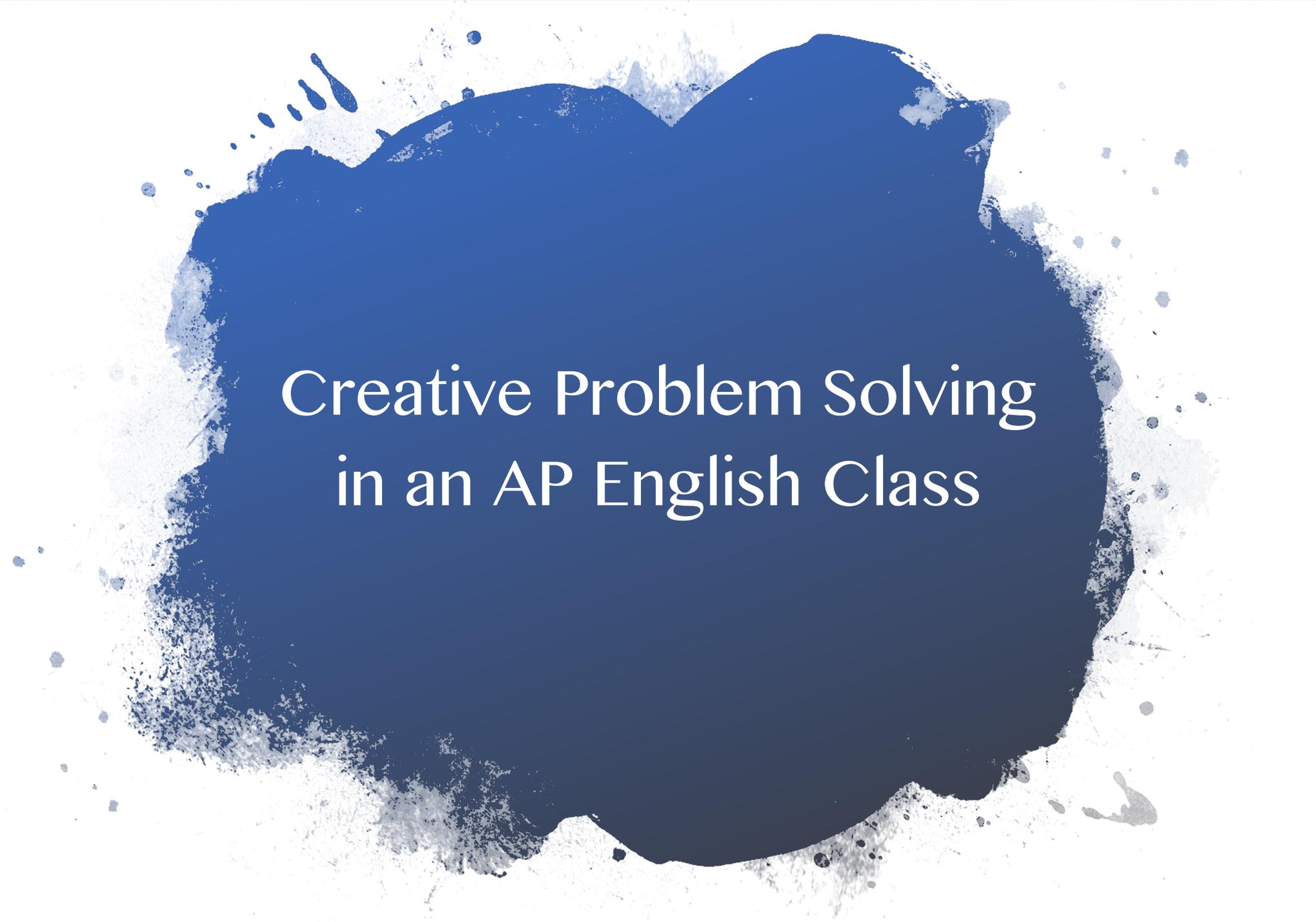
- “To be considered creative, a product or idea must be original or novel to the individual creator” (Starko, 2014, p. 12).
- Creative Problem Solving Model: a framework of interchangeable steps that include “planning your approach...generating ideas...preparing for action...[and] understanding the challenge” (Treffinger & Isaksen, 2005, p. 348).
 - Encourages students to find exciting and inspiring challenges
 - Work in ways that are aligned to their understanding of the problem to create unique and innovative solutions

Why Creativity and Creative Problem Solving?

- Changes in the job market demonstrate a need for employees to be innovative problem solvers (Bodell, 2014; Saebo, McCammon, & O'Farrell, 2007) who can find unique approaches to complex challenges (Saebo et al., 2007)
- However, focus on standardized assessments can leave little time for creativity in the classroom (Newman, 2008)
- Creative thinking skills are closely linked to student problem-solving ability (Treffinger & Isaksen, 2005) and is becoming an essential quality in the development of leadership skills (Bodell, 2014)

Why Creativity and Creative Problem Solving?

- Positive benefits of infusing creativity into instruction:
 - “...fluency, originality, detailing, early closure resistance and abstractness of titles” (Cetinkaya, 2013)
 - Relationship between effective leadership skills and creativity (Bodell, 2014)
- Connection to Common Core State Standards (Wilhelm, 2014)



Creative Problem Solving
in an AP English Class



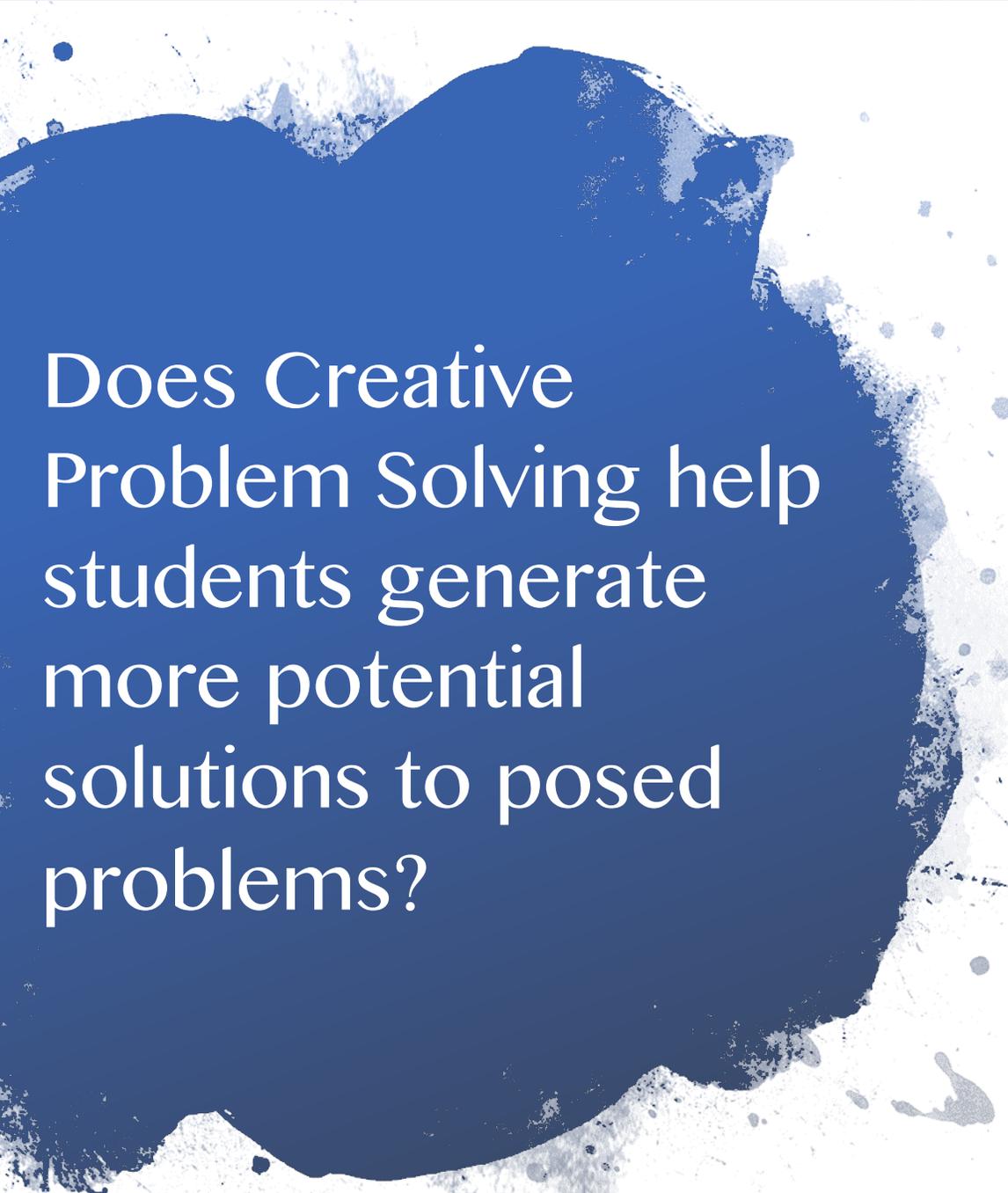
Context:

- Action Research Project for Master's Capstone in Gifted Education
- 13 high school juniors in an English III Advanced Placement Language and Composition Course
- Students were preoccupied with having the “right answer,” or were unwilling to share their ideas for fear of being wrong

Does Creative Problem Solving help students generate more potential solutions to posed problems?

CPS Unit: Overview

- 6-week unit, “War and Its Effects”
- Included tasks that required students to exercise their creativity and break away from the idea of one “right” answer



Does Creative
Problem Solving help
students generate
more potential
solutions to posed
problems?

CPS Unit: Instructional Experiences

1. Brainteasers
2. “The Right to Fail,” by William Zinsser
3. “What if...?” Dialogue Journals
4. Socratic Seminars
5. Overseas Invention Challenge
6. Getting into the Mind of a Character

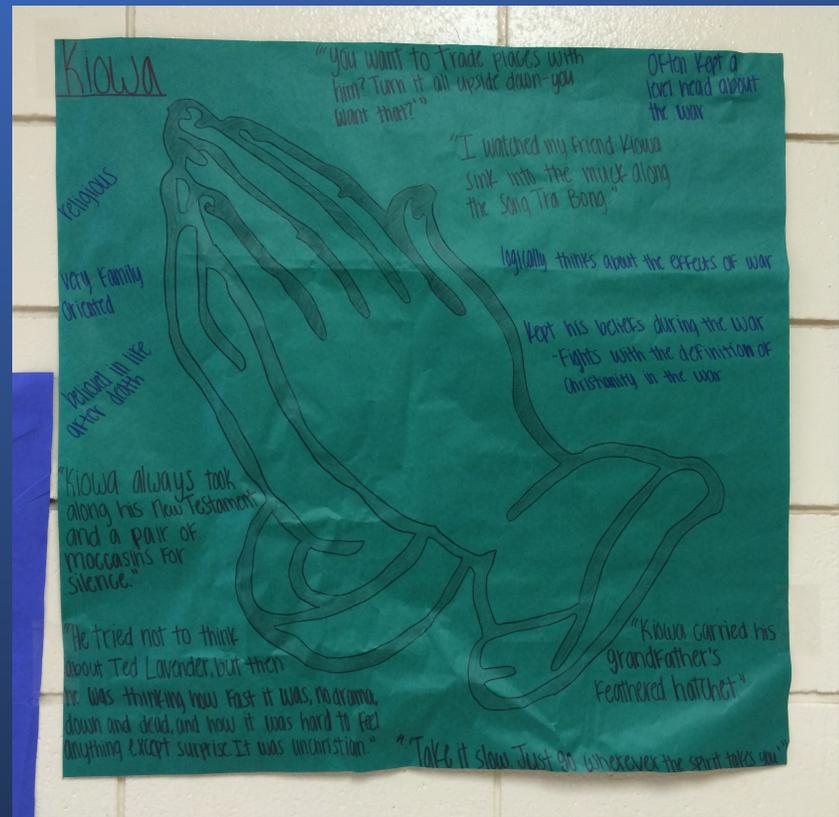
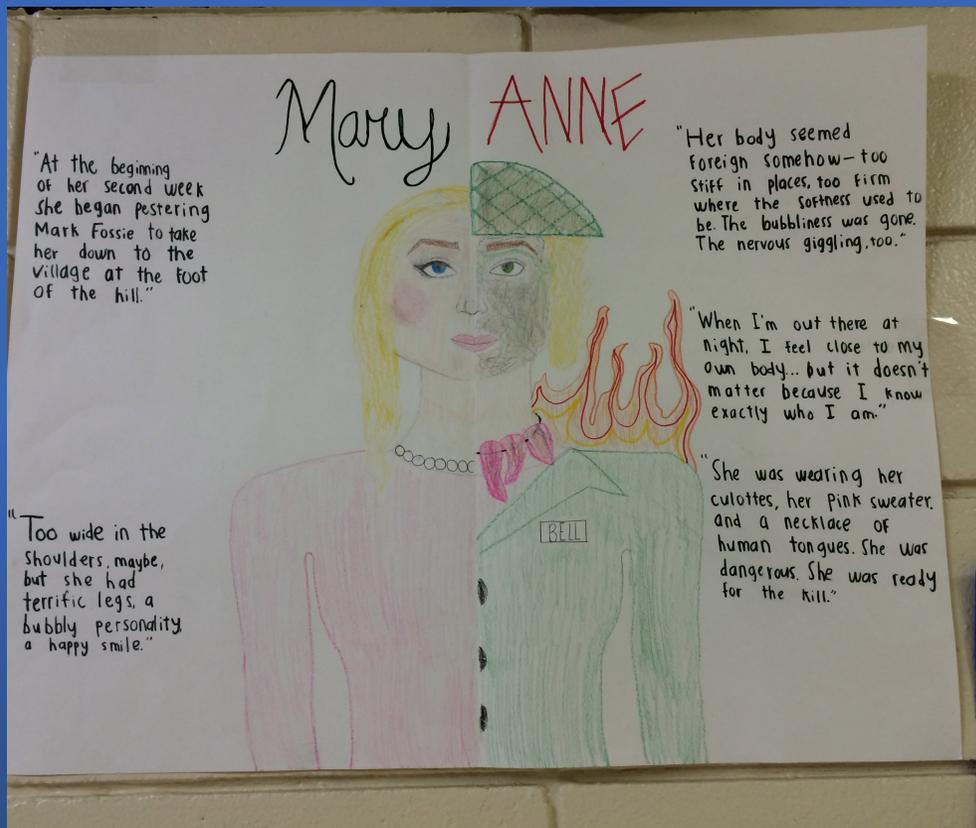
Brainteaser

A farmer has to get a sack of corn, a chicken, and a fox across a river. The farmer is only able to bring one of the above items along with him at a time. The only problem is if he leaves the fox alone with the chicken, the fox will eat the chicken, and if he leaves the chicken alone with the corn sack, then the chicken will eat the corn sack.

How does the farmer get all 3 items across safely?

Getting into the Mind of a Character

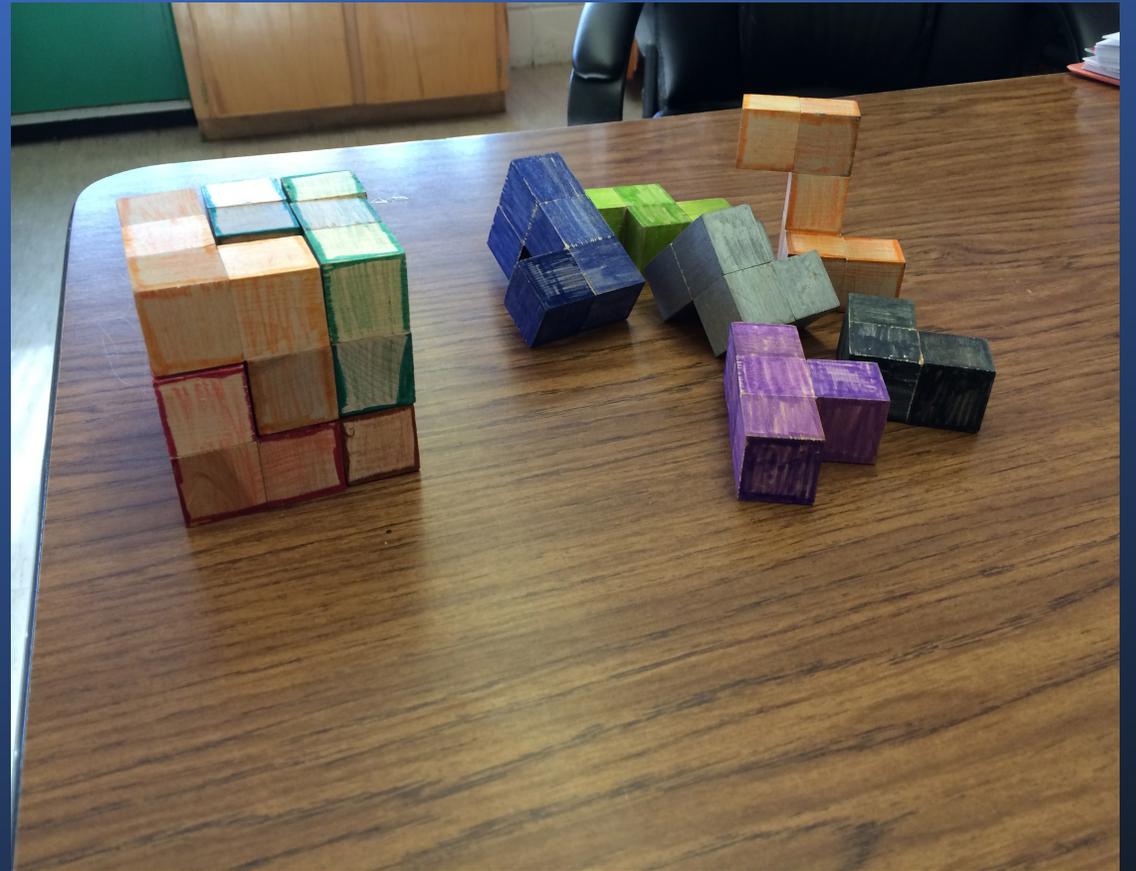
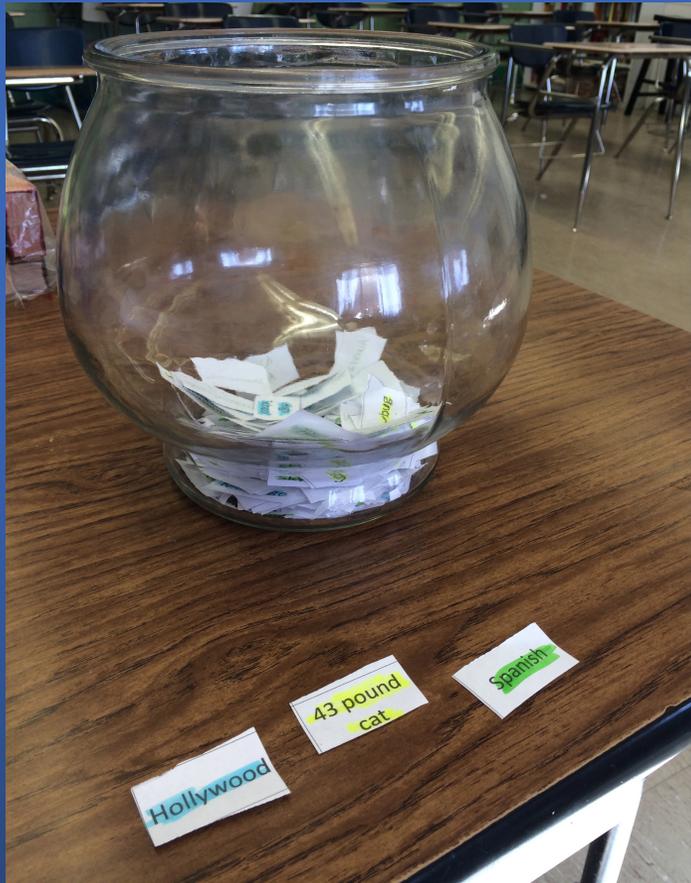
- Students were tasked with creating a visual impression of a character from the novel, *The Things They Carried*
 - Character traits and changes
 - Visual to portray the character—considerations included: motivation and values, virtues and vices, images, conflicts, public v. private self
 - Quotations that indicated traits or changes about a character



Getting into the Mind of a Character

Overseas Invention Challenge

- Challenge: To create an invention (some form of entertainment) to send to a soldier
 1. Students kept track of ideas in an invention log
 2. Used one idea and created the invention
 3. Presented their invention to the class



Overseas Invention Challenge

Does Creative
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CPS Unit: Assessments

1. Student survey on perceptions of creativity
2. Pre-, mid-, and post-survey
3. Creative Problem Solving assignment
4. Overseas Invention Challenge
5. Socratic Seminars

Student Survey on Creativity

1. Being creative will play a role in my future.
2. Everyone is or has the ability to be creative.
3. Creativity is an important quality and it should be nurtured in a school setting.
4. I consider myself to be a creative individual.
5. My educational setting is stifling my personal creativity.
6. Creativity is valuable to society.
7. I believe I am living up to my creative potential.

Creative Problem Solving Assignment

- Step 1: Students were asked to carry around a small journal over the course of two weeks and tasked with noticing problems/questions/concerns that they saw, thought of, or encountered.
- Step 2: In particular, students recorded various problems, questions, and/or concerns related to the unit of study, War and Its Effects.

Creative Problem Solving Assignment

- Student-generated problems included:
 - Morals as they relate to a war
 - Mental health of soldiers and their families
 - “Is it right or wrong for the American Sniper to be viewed as a hero for killing so many people?”
 - “(What are) solutions for making sure we don’t have a nuclear war and effects of a nuclear war?”
 - “Is America still having problems with pirates?”

Creative Problem Solving Assignment

- Step 1: Students were asked to carry around a small journal over the course of two weeks and tasked with noticing problems/questions/concerns that they saw, thought of, or encountered.
- Step 2: In particular, students recorded various problems, questions, and/or concerns related to the unit of study, War and Its Effects.
- Step 3: Students selected one problem or issue that was most interesting to them and conducted independent research on the topic to learn more about it.
- Step 4: After they gathered research, students then generated a specific problem statement.
- Step 5: Over the course of approximately one week, students were tasked with generating as many possible solutions to their identified problem.

Brainteaser: Solved!

A farmer has to get a sack of corn, a chicken, and a fox across a river. The farmer is only able to bring one of the above items along with him at a time. The only problem is if he leaves the fox alone with the chicken, the fox will eat the chicken, and if he leaves the chicken alone with the corn sack, then the chicken will eat the corn sack.

How does the farmer get all 3 items across safely?



A Spin on
the Traditional
Research Paper

Out/In/Out: Another Creative Alternative

- **Out:** Objective writing *about a piece of art*. Characterized by concrete details and heavy description.
- **In:** Subjective writing *based on a memory but without actually describing or making reference to the piece of art*.
 - Begins with “When I was _____ years old, I...”

“The Simple Truth”

by Philip Levine

I bought a dollar and a half's worth of small red potatoes, took them home, boiled them in their jackets and ate them for dinner with a little butter and salt. Then I walked through the dried fields on the edge of town. In middle June the light hung on in the dark furrows at my feet, and in the mountain oaks overhead the birds were gathering for the night, the jays and mockers squawking back and forth, the finches still darting into the dusty light. The woman who sold me the potatoes was from Poland; she was someone out of my childhood in a pink spangled sweater and sunglasses praising the perfection of all her fruits and vegetables at the road-side stand and urging me to taste even the pale, raw sweet corn trucked all the way, she swore, from New Jersey. "Eat, eat" she said, "Even if you don't I'll say you did."

Some things

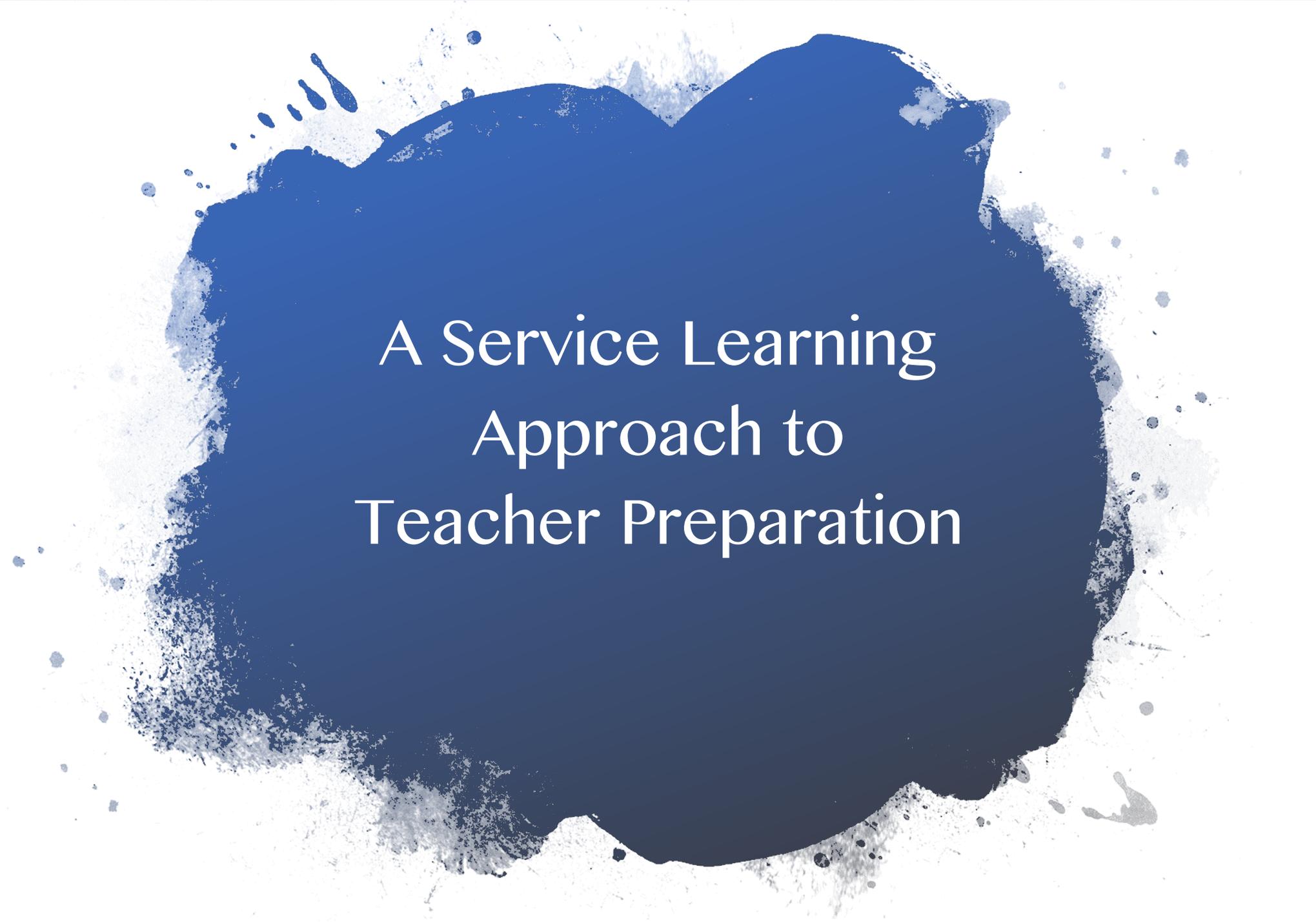
you know all your life. They are so simple and true they must be said without elegance, meter and rhyme, they must be laid on the table beside the salt shaker, the glass of water, the absence of light gathering in the shadows of picture frames, they must be naked and alone, they must stand for themselves. My friend Henri and I arrived at this together in 1965 before I went away, before he began to kill himself, and the two of us to betray our love. Can you taste what I'm saying? It is onions or potatoes, a pinch of simple salt, the wealth of melting butter, it is obvious, it stays in the back of your throat like a truth you never uttered because the time was always wrong, it stays there for the rest of your life, unspoken, made of that dirt we call earth, the metal we call salt, in a form we have no words for, and you live on it.

Out/In/Out: Another Creative Alternative

- **Out:** Objective writing *about a piece of art*. Characterized by concrete details and heavy description.
- **In:** Subjective writing *based on a memory but without actually describing or making reference to the piece of art*.
 - Begins with “When I was _____ years old, I....”
- **Out:** Final piece *brings the objective and subjective writing together* for a richer take on the topic
 - Begins with “Can you see what I’m saying? It is _____ or _____, _____ or _____, _____ or _____.”

Out/In/Out: Research Approach

- **Out:** Objective writing about the topic of study. Characterized by context, facts, statistics, expert opinion, etc.
- **In:** Subjective or emotional connection to the topic of study.
 - Begins by telling a story connected to the topic.
- **Out:** Final piece that synthesizes the objective and subjective writing for a richer and more enlightened take on the topic that can become the introduction
 - For example: This could begin with “Can you see what I’m saying? It is _____ or _____, _____ or _____, _____ or _____.”



A Service Learning
Approach to
Teacher Preparation



Context: Improving the Blank Page

- Teachers receive a total of 50+ hours of professional development
- Summer Intersession:
 - Week 1: Teachers only – “Writing Boot Camp”
 - Week 2: GEAR UP students + teachers –themed writing camp
- School writing clubs
- Ongoing PD
- Partnership with Festival of Words (writing contest, Word Crawl, workshops, community stage)
- At least one big event/experience per semester (2017-18 @ Vermilionville)



Context: Vermilionville

- Historic village within Bayou Vermilion District created to preserve and interpret the region's three founding cultures: Acadians, Creoles, and Native Americans
- Represents the timeframe 1765 – 1890
- Traditional craft demonstrations, musicians, dancing, foodways, cultural exchange, historic architecture, conservation
- 19 attractions on 23 acres: 7 original homes, 12 structure reproductions



Maison des Cultures: Le Musée de Soi (The Museum of the Self)

Essential Questions:

- What do you want to be remembered for?
- How do artifacts operate as symbols of a culture?

Maison des Cultures: Le Musée de Soi (The Museum of the Self)

1. Complete graphic organizer as if you are filling a museum about yourself:
 - Come up with a theme for three rooms of your museums
 - What images or pictures would be in the room?
 - What words or descriptions would be in the room?
 - What artifacts from your life (past, present, or future) would be in this room?

Maison des Cultures: Le Musée de Soi (The Museum of the Self)

2. Using the third person point of view, write a short story telling about a visit to your museum. Create dynamic character(s), and describe either an event that happens to your character at the museum or the effect your museum has on your character.
3. Sketch a depiction of the layout and content of your museum.

Sparking Creativity

Making Connections:

Pick one problem from the list you created at the beginning of this session. Consider how you might begin to solve or address this issue through a Creative Problem Solving approach.

Turn and talk to someone near you about your potential solution(s) to your posed problem.



Thank you very much!

Questions?

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