

## **Classroom Brainstorming using Twitter**

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A lesson plan to collaboratively brainstorm for a short story (topics, characters, setting, plot, etc.) using popular micro blogging application, Twitter, which limits a micro blog post, or “tweet” to 140 characters.

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-8

**ESTIMATED TIME:** 45 minutes

### **LESSON GOAL:**

To conduct a collaborative, classroom discussion and brainstorming session on a short story

To appropriately and ethically use technology to promote classroom learning

To reinforce student exposure to the Elements of a Short Story

To introduce students to Character Development concepts (dynamic, static, protagonist, antagonist, etc.)

To reinforce appropriate classroom collaborative behavior

### **PURPOSE/RATIONALE:**

When generating ideas for a short story narrative, students can often have a hard time deciding on what to write. Brainstorming during the Pre-Writing Process is an excellent way for students to generate ideas in a free-flow environment. Additionally, collaborative brainstorming allows students to contribute ideas which help other students develop their ideas for a short story.

Brainstorming is also an excellent strategy to tap into students’ prior knowledge, give all students a chance to express their ideas, to eliminate fear of failures, to have students practice showing respect for each other, and to tap into individual student creativity.

Twitter is a particularly good technological tool to use in the brainstorming process. The ease of its interface means that there's not much to get in the way of recording the rapid flow of ideas. Also, students who typically have difficulty expressing their thoughts vocally are presented with another medium to contribute to the classroom discussion. Using Twitter in the brainstorming process is also an excellent way to show the students the progress they’ve made. At the end of the brainstorming session, you will be able to show the students the direction in which their ideas flowed.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Given a topic for guidance, students will actively participate in Brainstorming, a part of the Pre-Writing Process.
2. Students will create elements of a story (plot, characters, setting, conflict, resolution) using

an online, collaborative process.

3. Students will collaborate in an online classroom discussion.

#### MATERIALS:

1. Computers (one for each student, and one for the teacher)
2. LCD projector (to be connected to the teacher computer)
3. Internet connection
4. Group or classroom account on Twitter (<http://twitter.com>)
5. Individual accounts on Twitter (one per student)
6. Group or classroom account on GroupTweet (<http://grouptweet.com>)

Students must FOLLOW the group/classroom account on their own Twitter accounts

7. TweetDeck or other desktop Twitter client (not necessary if students will use Twitter through a web browser)

#### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE/SCHEMA:

Students should already be familiar with the basics of Twitter and what a micro blog is. Students should have already had experience using Twitter to post a micro blog, a direct message, and a reply. Students should already be familiar with the Elements of a Short Story

#### OPENING/ANTICIPATORY SET:

Tell students that they, as a class, will be brainstorming ideas and story elements for a short story that they will individually write later on. Explain that they will use Twitter to generate ideas and class discussion on the various Elements of a Story. During the class, they will each have the opportunity to contribute their ideas to creating a Setting, the Plot, the Conflict, the Characters involved in the story, the Point of View, and the Theme.

#### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:

Review with them the elements of a story: Setting, Plot, Conflict, Character, Point of View, Theme. If needed, direct students' attentions to the screen, and navigate your web browser to: <http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/elements.html> to review in detail the elements of a short story.

#### OPENING/ANTICIPATORY SET:

Explain to students that for this class discussion, they need to be logged into their Twitter account, and any "tweet" they post needs to be a Direct Message addressed to the class Twitter account. Also remind them that any "tweet" they post does not need to be grammatically correct, but it does have to "be understood" and it must be appropriate for the classroom. Remind students that during the brainstorming process there are no wrong answers, and that their goal is to try to get as many ideas as possible.

#### INPUT/MODELING:

Navigate your web browser to your Twitter account, or your desktop Twitter client, such as TweetDeck, in order to show students that your classroom brainstorming will begin.

#### INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

Ask students to log into their Twitter account from their computer so that the online discussion can begin.

#### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:

Make sure that all students are able to access and log into their Twitter account via their web browser or through their computer's desktop Twitter application (TweetDeck, or others).

#### GUIDED PRACTICE:

Begin the online classroom discussion by posting a "tweet" asking students to post their short story ideas. If input from students is slow, try posting some short story ideas of your own. You can use this opportunity to discuss Life Skills for students, by suggesting that they write about something relevant to their lives, such as bullying, gossip, peer pressure, drugs, etc.) Once online discussion begins, remind students that no idea is bad during the brainstorming process, and that everyone's thoughts are welcome.

#### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:

Ask students how they feel about conducting their classroom discussion using Twitter. Particularly, do they feel that the 140 character limit is a good thing or a bad thing?

#### GUIDED PRACTICE/INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

Continue facilitating the classroom discussion, making sure to spend enough time on each Short Story Element, while also asking questions (either verbally or through "tweets") to elicit more detailed ideas. Refer to the Elements of a Short Story webpage as needed. At this time, ideas and class discussion should "flow naturally," allowing the students to guide the brainstorming session themselves, with minimal direction from the teacher.

#### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:

As class time is about to come to a close, post a "tweet" to wrap up the discussion, asking if students feel like they have generated "enough" ideas. If students would like to continue their classroom discussion, allow them to continue to post "tweets" to the group/class account outside of class time.

#### GUIDED PRACTICE/INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

Direct students' attentions to the overhead projector display, where you will be scrolling up and down all their posts, to show them how much discussion was generated. Say that if want to review the posts themselves, they can do so outside of class time. Say that this class/group

account will remain active, so that students can go to it and view it as a record for their own reference or to continue discussion.

#### INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

Ask students to log out of their Twitter account on the computers and close any web browser or application they have opened.

#### CLOSURE:

Begin a verbal classroom discussion to “debrief” the class activity.

(Share) Did students like using Twitter to brainstorm as a class/group? Why or why not? What were some of the benefits of using a program like Twitter for classroom discussion? What were some things they didn’t like or had challenges with?

(Process) Were all of the students able to contribute to the classroom discussion? Did any students have trouble adjusting their writing to “only 140 characters”? Did any students prefer that?

(Generalize) Other than just using Twitter in class, what else do the students think they accomplished today? When have you had to use brainstorming before?

(Apply) Can a program like Twitter be used for other classroom discussions, not just during brainstorming? What else can we as a class use Twitter for? What can other people use Twitter for, other than self-sharing? Is brainstorming only useful when trying to write something? When else would using brainstorming be useful?

#### POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES FOR EXTENSION:

If students are responsive to using Twitter as a medium for writing, have them go to:

<http://twitter.com/manyvoices> which is a completely Twitter-based, collaborative short story written by students around the U.S. You can download a .pdf version of the completed short story at: <http://manyvoices.wikispaces.com/>

By comparing the Twitter page for #manyvoices with the printed/completed short story, students can see how everything written in the story started out as a 140 character “tweet.”