



A Teacher's Guide to the

Multigenre Research Project

*Everything You Need
to Get Started*

Melinda Putz

Foreword by **TOM ROMANO**

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*Dedicated to my family:
My husband, John.
My two remarkable sons, Kevin and David.*

For their love, continued encouragement, and belief in me.

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Foreword

You would love to have Melinda Putz teaching down the hall. She would be a bright presence in the workday. In Melinda you would have a colleague as passionate as you are about the creative and intellectual capacity of adolescents. There would be no bragging from her. No self-aggrandizement. What you'd get from Melinda would be savvy talk about teaching and learning, responsible, inventive pedagogy, and an infectious enthusiasm for multigenre research projects.

Melinda learned about multigenre through *Writing with Passion*, my second book. She ran with the idea. She ran faster and farther than I imagined any teacher would. She was dazzled by this research paper that required students to bring together imagination and information to reveal facts and feelings in a multitude of genres.

I cannot write about *A Teacher's Guide to the Multigenre Research Project* without mentioning *voice*. This book has plenty of it—the informative, readable, often humorous voice of Melinda and the irrepressible voices of her high school juniors. These voices propel you through the book, and the entire time you are reading, you will be bending down page corners, highlighting passages, and writing marginal notes. This book is a powerful teaching tool.

Melinda Putz is a monster teacher (an expression I once heard Ralph Fletcher use). A monster teacher is creative and practical, intelligent and intuitive. A monster teacher has an unwavering vision of the big picture and a keen determination to address details. There is no stopping a monster teacher. Through multigenre writing, Melinda introduces students to ways of thinking and communicating that widen their eyes and make them reach farther than they thought they could. They often grasp what they reach for. That's because Melinda supports students every step of the way from finding a topic to packaging their final multigenre project.

A Teacher's Guide to the Multigenre Research Project is a Comstock Lode of ideas, strategies, and guidelines. Melinda provides rationale and handouts to accomplish essential steps in the process of multigenre research. She helps students comprehend the scope and depth of multigenre papers, conduct thorough and responsible research, write both traditional and nontraditional genres, evaluate their multigenre projects, and prepare to orally interpret them. Melinda knows, too, that these are days of accountability. And, so, as part of her pedagogical responsibility, she demonstrates how multigenre research writing meets state and national English and language arts standards.

I don't know that I've ever come across a teacher so good at breaking down complex ideas and processes to make them accessible to learners. This works for her students and it will work for you, too. Melinda's planning, good sense, and

troubleshooting will make multigenre research writing a reality in your classroom, whether you teach high school students in California or middle school students in rural Maine, whether your students are headed for AP exams or struggling to meet minimum standards.

Early in *A Teacher's Guide to the Multigenre Research Project* Melinda writes, "I have tried to create a resource that gets right to the point and makes a multifaceted project like this easy to orchestrate." As I said, no bragging from Melinda. But I'm telling you, Reader, there is no *trying* in this book. *A Teacher's Guide* is pointed, clear-eyed, and convincing. It will enhance the satisfaction you get from working with teenagers. You'll be a better teacher, and your students will be better researchers and writers.

Tom Romano
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
November 2005

GETTING ACQUAINTED

THE PROJECT. THE AUTHOR. THE GUIDE.

. . . and you'll remember yesterday I said I'd be introducing an exciting new project today—a research project.

Here it comes. Wonder what she has up her sleeve now.

Most of you have probably written a research paper before or have brothers or sisters who have.

Yeah, Elaine had a HUGE research paper she had to do on something for history last year—let's see—I think it was on The Battle of Gettysburg. She had stacks of books all over the kitchen table. She filled note card after note card with stuff and hogged the computer . . . I couldn't get on it for days. Didn't look like she was having any fun at all. She just wanted to get it over with.

What do you think of when you think of a research paper? Maybe an assigned topic, bundles of note cards, a long outline, formal language, and strict rules about the way you write, margins, spacing, and so on?

That's what I was thinkin' all right.

The multigenre research project, though, is different.

Oh, right.

You'll have lots of freedom here. You may choose your own subject—one you are really interested in—and decide how you will write about it: poetry, editorials, comic strips, recipes. . . . You might even—if it helps to convey your message better—misspell words, write in fragments, experiment with different fonts, include pictures and graphics, create a videotape or CD. . . . Well, really you're only limited by your own imaginations.

Misspell words? She's gotta be kidding! Make a video? Art? Now this is sounding like something!

There's quite a bit to it, but I'll help you through each step, from choosing a topic to presenting your project to the class. But most of the decisions will be up to you. This is your project; it should reflect not only what you learned about your subject and your enthusiasm for it, but your own personality as well.

Hmm. . . . Wonder if I could do mine on the wrestler, Kurt Angle. . . .

The Project

Kurt Angle, Joseph Stalin, Woodstock, or the California Gold Rush . . . almost anything's fair game for the multigenre research project. This free-spirited project is energizing students and teachers all across North America. It's no wonder that it is making increasingly more appearances in journals, conferences, and classrooms. Most English teachers, even if they haven't yet incorporated it into their programs, know something about it. Although usually it isn't replacing the formal research paper in high school curriculums, it is proving to be an attractive alternative or addition. Generally then, what is this multigenre research project, how does it differ from the more traditional approach to researched writing, and what does it offer that a formal research paper doesn't?

In the multigenre research project, the student selects a topic and does research as if it were a traditional research paper: collecting information and recording it, synthesizing the information, then presenting it through writing. Instead of the single, extended prose piece of a traditional research paper, though, the multigenre paper consists of a number of creative pieces—poetry, advice columns, diary entries, news articles, lists, artwork, graphics, and alternate styles of writing—imaginative writing based on fact.

And, unlike the research conducted for a traditional paper, research for a multigenre paper often does not begin with a working thesis. That is, whereas traditionally a researcher begins with a premise and looks for evidence to support it, the multigenre researcher begins with an interest and discovers a unifying element along the way. It is this emergent theme that often suggests a thread with which the writer may create cohesion among the separate pieces of writing.

Another noticeable difference between the multigenre research project and the traditional research paper is the writer's relationship with the subject. In order to establish and reflect lack of bias, the traditional researcher/writer is required to stay at a distance. The writer stands clearly outside, examining with the cold objectivity of a scientist and reporting with measured, well-organized logic. In contrast, since the multigenre researcher attempts to enter the world of the subject, the creative pieces produced may be anything but objective. Though the multigenre project may present a kind of objectivity overall, the individual pieces may reflect strong biases, each one taking different points of view.

Those shifting points of view help the writer and the reader of the multigenre paper see the subject from all kinds of interesting angles. A particular genre might portray an event through the eyes of the subject, others who were present, or even an inanimate object. The overall tone, then, could be formal and serious as in a traditional research paper, but is just as likely to be angry or whimsical.

In regard to language, the multigenre project allows a great deal of freedom, too. Yet certainly it does not do away with convention; it just widens the parameters. That may mean writing labyrinthine sentences or fragments, using capital letters within words or purposeful misspellings—whatever it takes to communicate the ideas and the mood inherent in the subject.

All of this is just about the writing, though. Even though the multigenre paper is the centerpiece of the project, the multigenre experience for my students has over the years evolved into so much more than that. What began as a simple paper with three genres in a folder has blossomed into a project including seven or more genres, experimentation with alternate styles of writing, art and graphic design, creative packaging, group discussions, and thematic readers' theatre presentations. It is language arts wrapped up in a spirited, engaging package.

The following chart highlights some of the differences between the traditional research paper and the multigenre project.

Traditional Research Paper	Multigenre Research Paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single, extended prose piece • begins with a thesis • cohesion imposed from the start • writer remains dispassionate about subject • approaches topic from a single perspective • follows conventions of formal prose writing • usually consists of only text • usually done as a solitary individual assignment • handed in to teacher • sometimes viewed as drudgery by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cohesive series of pieces in variety of genres • begins with an interest • cohesion developed along the way • helps researcher recover lost voices • writer personally engaged; opinions encouraged • takes many angles on topic • broadens the range of acceptable writing styles • artwork, graphics, design and packaging accompany text • involves much small-group work, peer response, and sharing • performed in readers' theatre celebration • often becomes students' favorite and proudest achievement

Nothing can better define the multigenre project, however, than a brief preview of the brilliant student work that appears in this book. Each year I am surprised by what my students produce—the variety of interesting choices, the design and writing of their projects, and the clever ways they combine their ideas and their writings, to create thematic readers' theatres.

But perhaps first I should set the stage for you, invite you into my world, for it is here that all of the work in this book originated. Welcome to Ithaca, a rural community in “The Middle of the Mitten” of Michigan. Surrounded by rich farmland and home to around twenty industrial employers, the town of three thousand is proud, hardworking, and supportive of their educational system. I look out the windows of my school and see cornfields and U.S. Highway 127. The middle and high school building serves 658 students. Ithaca High School supports the usual athletic teams as well as a number of competitive academic activities such as Model U.N., Quiz Bowl, and even a Writing Team. One week is Future Farmers of America Week; we'll have Tractor Day and Bean Soup Day among other events. In short, we are a slice of mid-America. Now take a look at what these small-town eleventh graders have produced.

Collage by Kathryn Vickery

My experience has been that students never seem to run out of ideas for new and interesting topics. Still, I was surprised when Kathryn Vickery, my student a few years ago, chose *raves* as her subject. Initially her mother and I questioned the appropriateness of her choice, but Kathryn's project turned out to be one of the most creative, informative, and memorable ones ever submitted. Never having attended a rave herself—in fact, raves probably hadn't even made it to mid-Michigan—Kathryn had read about them in an article in *Newsweek* or *Time* and was curious. Through her project I learned that raves are secretive, often very large, dance parties for teens. They usually feature music that Kathryn describes as “acid house variations of techno music,” and include heavy drug use, particularly the drug Ecstasy. Her project included a recipe for the rave; a phone call between concerned parents; an audiotape with representative music and a liner describing it; a diary; a scrapbook with pictures and written descriptions of rave personalities and activities; a reading log—type response to an article on raves; a double-voice piece between an experienced rave attendee and a newcomer; and this alternate-style piece describing the potentially dangerous effects of Ecstasy.

One more pill *his eyes say*
one more pill
just one more

what can it hurt? *his eyes ask*

ECSTASY

A hasty swallow and *the eyes brighten* to a unnatural glassy stare

dancing

*fasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfaster
andfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfaster
andfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfasterfasterandfaster*

the eyes grow frantic as the effects take hold and the final dose the body cant handle, the 6000th mg of MDMA, is the overload.

happy floating,
urges to touch
increased awareness,
heightened sensations,
talking, talking, talking,
spiritual well-being
happy giddiness

sounded great

until

the final overdose

convulsions
the eyes now fill with fear,
no control
grasping, nothing to hold onto
gasping, nothing to breathe

people screaming, running frantically



[Kathryn found information for this piece in "MDMA Effects." Erowid. 28 Oct. 1999: 2 pp. Available online. www.erowid.org/chemicals/mdma/mdma-effects.shtml.]

Imagine that the information about Ecstasy were presented in a traditional research paper. We would learn the facts about the drug: its chemical ingredients, desired effects, and possible dangers. We would get the cold, hard, frightening facts.

Now look again at what Kathryn has done. She has not only provided the specifics about Ecstasy, but has helped the reader to participate in the rave itself.

Mesmerized as we read her lyrical piece, we, like the young man in his drug-induced state, are speechless. We experience Ecstasy's desired effects, one by one, from floating to giddiness. We are drawn onto the dance floor where the repetitive, rhythmic beats of the music catch us up and compel us to dance faster, and faster, and faster. Finally, we are appalled by the convulsions, the grasping, the gasping, and the end. And Kathryn forces us to watch *his eyes* as they move from desire, to need, bliss, fear, hysteria, and even beyond the piece, to the glazed eyes of death. She uses font, spacing, repetition, alliteration, placement on the page, and of course, word choice, to accomplish much more than she could have in a traditional research paper style. Kathryn has not only managed to immerse herself in the world of her research, she has taken us with her as well.

Obituary style by Ryan Litwiller

Having a car is a first priority for teenagers in our area, especially for boys. Ryan Litwiller decided to do his multigenre research on his dream vehicle—the Hummer. His project, enclosed in a packet of official documents, included a Job Openings announcement to work in Hummer's engineering department; a lengthy dialogue between President Clinton and a designer of the Hummer stretch limo; a radio advertisement; a newspaper New Arrivals column announcing new purchases; a political cartoon pointing out the gas-guzzling nature of Hummers; an advertisement for Hummer Tours of Denver; a couple of alternate style poems; a letter to Santa (guess what the kid wants); and the following obituary.

1992 Jeep Wrangler 4x4

A green Jeep Wrangler, 7 years of running, of West Virginia, died Thursday, October 28, 1999, at the base of the Appalachian Mountains in Charleston, West Virginia.

The Jeep was manufactured in Detroit, Michigan, at the Jeep and Eagle Assembly plant. In late 1992 it was bought by Fred Davis of Pontiac, who later moved down South in 1997 where 4x4s are needed dearly in the rough winter months.

The Jeep Wrangler couldn't handle the rough terrain of the Appalachian Mountains. In 1998 the Jeep completely rusted out due to the major salt in West Virginia for the treacherously icy conditions.

The 4.0 liter engine was also wearing down.

"I should have known better," Davis said after his Jeep's last ride. "I should have bought a Hummer instead. It would have cost me a little more, but it would have been worth the \$90,000 to purchase a vehicle that has a minimum life of twelve years. Hummers can also go through any type of terrain, whereas my Jeep got stuck a number of times."

The Jeep was preceded in death by his sister, a red Jeep Wrangler.

Funeral services will be on Friday, November 5 at the Jeep Cemetery in Charleston, West Virginia. Burial will follow the services.

[Ryan explained that he found the obituary's format in a newspaper and that the content sources he used were the same he used throughout his research.]

I have a feeling this obituary was less about the Hummer than a bit of gentle ribbing to his friend who was researching the Jeep. I can just see the sparkle in Ryan's eyes as he wrote this. In the midst of the fun, though, is a successful rendering of newspaper obituary style and information about the manufacturer's claims.

Diary entry by Katie Baleja

For years, Katie Baleja had collected everything to do with the fashion model doll Barbie, and she wanted to learn more about her long-time hobby. Again, here's a topic that I didn't think would be very content rich. Again, I was wrong. I had no idea that there was so much to learn about Barbie. I won't bother to list every genre Katie included—there were so many—but I will say that they were all cleverly packaged in the pink Barbie case, little ones hanging on the tiny plastic hangers, others slipped neatly behind.

In Barbie's diary entry that follows, we learn much about the controversies surrounding her.

Behind the Scenes

How I Deal with the Way the World Perceives Me

Dear Diary,

You would think that being the idealistic teen model would be easy, but it is not. Trying to please everyone, being up-to-the-minute on fashions and styles, and still attempting to be the wholesome young adult that mothers want their daughters to resemble becomes pretty complicated. When I was created back in 1959, my original goal was to provide a three-dimensional figure for young girls to relate to and help them associate with the real adult world. No one would have ever dreamed that I would become Mattel's biggest success and play such an important role in girls' lives.

Because I was modeled after a sexy blonde doll from Germany named Lili, many disapproved of me. Mothers of young girls were very reluctant to allow their daughters to associate with me when I first came out in stores. Mothers thought that I would corrupt their children's minds and that I was too "old and mature" for them. Through the help of careful advertising, Mattel finally got the message across that Barbie truly was wholesome, but some still weren't convinced.

One of the worst things I have put myself through to try and help more people approve of me and keep up with fashions, is all of the numerous plastic surgeries I have undergone. My face has changed many times since 1959 in order to keep up with current styles, yet my figure still does not resemble the modern young woman. Because of concerns about eating disorders in adolescent girls, my slim figure still is a topic of controversy. If made life size, I would be so out of proportion that I would probably be unable to stand, let alone do all of the activities that I am associated with—like fitness and modeling.

I have continued to be ostracized by experts of good breeding and etiquette, teachers, and sociologists, all of whom worry about the future of

today's young girls who are persuaded by what is in the experts' eyes—a very negative model of womanhood. This makes life hard for me since I am always having to make sure that what I do in no way degrades women, so that I am not the focus of feminist attacks. Despite negative comments from feminist groups, over the years I have helped women step further forward in asserting female equality. One of the first major steps was in 1971 when my side glance was turned into looking straight ahead.

I have come a long way over the forty-one years that I have been around. I continue to thrive with the support of my loyal fans despite negativity from feminine groups, but what matters most to me is that I am accomplishing my goal of helping girls relate to the adult world.

[Katie writes in her endnotes that much of the information for this piece came from: Tosa, Marco. *Barbie: Four Decades of Fashion, Fantasy, and Fun*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.]

How cleverly Katie delivers the content of her research, presenting some of the history of Barbie and allowing us to look at the pressures on the toy industry to keep pace with public opinion. Katie enables us to see both sides of the question—that Barbie's figure may have a negative effect on young impressionable girls whose bodies cannot possibly measure up, and that the toymakers struggle persistently to produce a toy that will sell and is still politically correct. It is not too difficult, however, to read between the lines and see that Katie sees pretty much eye to eye with Barbie. Katie is one of those "loyal fans."

Phone call transcript by Jacob Gruesbeck

Not all writing for multigenre projects is so free spirited. Some of it, because of the nature of the subject or of its author (usually very much related), is unornamented and straightforward. This is true of the pieces created for Jacob Gruesbeck's multigenre work on the Manhattan Project. Contained in a brown file marked "Top Secret," all of the "documents" look and sound official. Jacob includes a telegram; four slips with definitions we might need to understand such a technical topic; an interview with Oppenheimer; an official letter to Oppenheimer from Brigadier General Leslie R. Groves; a memo about laboratory policies; a journal entry reflecting on the events at Los Alamos; an extensive timeline of the final year; and the following phone call transcript concerning the purchase of the land for the Los Alamos site.

Date: November 16, 1942

Phone call between Brigadier General Leslie Groves and Colonel James Marshall.

Marshall's secretary: Hello.

Groves: Colonel Marshall, please.

Marshall's secretary: May I ask who is speaking?

Groves: Brigadier General Groves.

Marshall's secretary: Just a moment.

Marshall: Groves, good work on buying the land in Tennessee. Any idea when it will be operational?

Groves: Well, we don't know yet, but it should be the perfect site to have our uranium enrichment facilities. We will be calling it Oak Ridge.

Marshall: Have you found a site for the Project Y laboratory?

Groves: That's what this call is about. I think we have found a site in central New Mexico.

Marshall: Good. Where exactly in New Mexico?

Groves: The Los Alamos Ranch School for boys, outside of Sante Fe. Dr. Oppenheimer went there. He said that the school was for soft and sickly boys to help toughen them up.

Marshall: How far outside Sante Fe is it?

Groves: Approximately thirty miles.

Marshall: Are there any problems with the site?

Groves: Just a few, the biggest being water and the road.

Marshall: How are those problems bad?

Groves: There is only one road from the school to Sante Fe which is in terrible shape. While there could be a problem with water shortages if a lot of people move on site.

Marshall: I don't plan on having too many people on site, but if there are we could easily work on wells or pipes. The road should also be easy enough to fix. Just have a group of workers work on smoothing it out. It should be fine then.

Groves: That is what I was thinking. It shouldn't cost too much to fix them either.

Marshall: Have you got an estimate on the land yet?

Groves: Not yet, but the school will probably take nearly any offer we put on the table.

Marshall: Oh really, why?

Groves: Well, it seems that due to the war, the school has fallen on hard times financially, because of less enrollment I would presume.

Marshall: What types of buildings are there?

Groves: Well, the school house, of course, and the teachers' and students' dormitories; just to name a few of the largest.

Marshall: What is the terrain like?

Groves: The school is actually on a mesa, but it is so secluded that we should be able to keep the same amount of security as we would have anywhere else. It is also located between the Jemez Mountains and Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range, which offer an absolutely amazing view. I think that the view alone should be able to convince some scientists to join our cause.

Marshall: What site do you plan to use for testing?

Groves: I think we can use Alamogordo's bombing range.

Marshall: I like the sounds of this site. So go ahead and proceed with the purchase of the land. Be sure to contact me as soon as you have acquired it. And please try to keep the price low, we are on a black ops budget.

Groves: I will do my best. Goodbye, Sir.

Marshall: Goodbye.

[Jacob wrote, "I took many facts and information from Daniel Cohen's *The Manhattan Project*. 1999. Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press."]

As Walter Cronkite would have said, "You were there" in this important moment in history as Groves and Marshall make plans for the establishment of Los Alamos. Jacob succeeds in capturing the register he imagines these generals would have used in this important conversation, tossing in a few official-sounding terms or phrases like "operational," "proceed with the purchase," and "black ops budget." We gain substantial information about his subject too—some hints about Oppenheimer's youth, and where, when, and why Los Alamos was chosen as the site for this project. Most importantly, Jacob reminds us of the horrifying nature of the Manhattan Project, hinting at the irony that this site of natural beauty would be the setting for the development of the atomic bomb. It wouldn't be long before the scientists' focus would not be "the absolutely amazing view" from the mountains, but—as Jacob shows us in another piece—"a mushroom cloud [rising] into the heavens."

A poem by Laura Bobier

The circus is coming to town! Children stretch on tiptoes to peer through knot-holes, gazing at the pitching of tents and long trains of exotic animals parading across the lot; performers and hands holler orders to trainers leading animals or workers assembling equipment, and the clang of mallet against steel stakes echoes. Familiar odors of hay, manure, and frankfurters mingle.

The circus is coming to town! And Laura Bobier successfully records the events and captures the atmosphere of the “Greatest Show on Earth,” the Barnum and Bailey Circus, in her multigenre pieces enclosed in . . . what else? A big, red-and-white-striped tent, of course. Plastic lions, tigers, and bears, grandstands filled with attendees, and even small Christmas lights around the ceiling help us to envision what it must have been like.

This six-room poem transports Laura’s readers to an earlier time, an exciting place. The format guides her to produce a piece that captures the sights, sounds, smells, and atmosphere of the circus.

A Day at the Circus

Entering a **big**, red tent.
 Paying fifty cents for admission.
 Bleachers are **packed** with 4000
 Popcorn-and-candy eating people.

Lights are flashing everywhere.
 Costumes of glitter, sparkles and beads dazzle.
 All becomes dark, but a single spotlight,
 Trying to find the ringmaster.

All is silent until **the roar . . .**
“Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention.
The show is about to begin!”
 Animals, fans, and performers alike cheer!

What acts are going to perform?
 Will Tom Thumb be here?
 Will the Elephants and clowns be first?
 Or will it be the Tiger whisperer?

People everywhere are excited.
 Everyone is anxious and waiting,
 For the first performer to step into the ring
 Surprise, nervousness, and Fear are at the circus.

The show is about to begin!
The show is about to begin!
The show is about to begin!
The show is about to begin!

[Laura wrote in her endnotes that she used this book to write her six-room poem: Freeman. (1962). *Great Days of the Circus*. New York: American Heritage Publishing. She further explained, “I didn’t quote anything from this book. I combined information on the sights, sounds, and acts that may have been in the circus, to put together a poem.”]

A poem by Emily Alfred

Emily Alfred packed this poignant, free-flowing piece about Ellis Island into a cardboard box suitcase along with journals, documents, menus, essays, and other poetry reflecting an immigrant's experience upon entering America.

The halls are left empty, and the corridors are layered with dust.

Vines are now growing over the windows, and damp corners are sprouting an assortment of moss.

The paint is peeling and in many places
Names and faces are scratched
Into the tired traces of objects left behind in a circumstance
Once bursting with the animation of life.

If this room could talk, what would it say? Would it tell you that a man found hope here, that a woman finally found the strength to pray? A little boy, who at this place was first given plenty of milk and bread, forever kept in his memory of that day what his father had said:

*"Today we start fresh, you, your mother and I.
We sit at the threshold of a new hope, that which only by the grace of God is nigh;
I will find work and here in America you will have a chance."*

The white walls and the little resilient tiles—they made some smile.
The thought of a new life, finally
A chance to escape the knife
Of the dreary dullness
Of the commonality of the once familiar strife.

In this place people could pass through the door which held promise and rewarding trials.

This is Ellis Isle.

[Emily's source was the book Redman, Renee C. *Life on Ellis Island*. San Diego: Lucent Books. 2000. She wrote in her endnotes that: "The book really provided the 'meat and potatoes' for the information in my project. After reading it, I tried to imagine the building and how I would feel if I experienced it firsthand in my poem about the building."]

Many fine things happen in this piece. First, we see what the detention center at Ellis Island might look like today—an empty, decaying piece of property. But present there, too, are the ghosts of an earlier time, etched into walls and memories. We get a sense of the relief and the fresh promise this new land offered, and

Emily helps us to see their significance by reminding us of the deprivation and struggles that drove the immigrants to America. She does so with her snapshot of a hungry little family who had lost their will even to pray, and especially through her startling juxtaposition of *knife* and *dullness*, portraying for us the reality of a pain so familiar it had lost its sharpness. Perhaps these newcomers could smile because it was their own *resilience* they saw reflected in the little tiles. And because, finally, they had found an open door to a new life.

I hope you can see from these few examples how immersed students become in their research and their writing; how their personalities are reflected through their projects; how much fun they had creating them; and especially how much they're learning about style, voice, and language.

The Author

It is my wish that this book will be the beginning of a conversation with you. I'd like to be the teacher from the classroom next door, the one who says, "Hey, I just tried the greatest thing in my class! Let me tell you about it." Granted, the conversation will have to be one-sided for a while. But as you read on, try out some of the ideas in the book, and if you have questions, comments, and ideas of your own to share, I hope you'll write. Now allow me to take the first step and introduce myself.

I'm Melinda—lots of friends call me Millie. My teaching experience is long and varied, beginning in 1970 in a very small town in Missouri, taking me to a large, St. Louis suburb, then to a small town in rural Michigan—ironically, also St. Louis—and finally to Ithaca, Michigan, where I've taught for the last twenty-three years. During my tenure in Ithaca, I have been granted time to experience teaching and learning abroad, too—a year in Edinburgh, Scotland; a semester in Kingston-upon-Hull, England; and a semester of study in Florence, Italy. Additionally, I have been an adjunct instructor for a number of years at Alma College, first teaching reading in the content areas and now language arts methods.

But those are just facts. To really know me, you should understand that I am the kind of teacher who might jump up and click my heels together when my students' responses are right on target or their effort is exemplary. That I feel my heart sink when heads rest on desktops or eyes steal glances at the clock. That I have looked out at a classroom of solemn faces in stunned silence as I choked back tears while reading aloud "The Gift of the Magi" or *The Education of Little Tree*. I let my students know me, and I want to know them.

Probably like you, my satisfaction in our profession comes from these interactions with my students, in challenging them and helping them to grow. But it also comes from the freedom I have to imagine and design lessons that engage, teach, and inspire.

Perhaps, these are all reasons why I was immediately attracted to the multigenre research project. Never have I taught a unit that encompasses so many learning goals while stimulating the imaginations and enthusiasm of young people. For the past ten years, the project has been a part of the curriculum at Ithaca High School. My students have gone from not knowing how to say the word *genre* to displaying their projects at graduation open houses and highlighting their multigenre memories in commencement addresses. The project has even won statewide recognition, selected in 2002 as one of eleven *Outstanding Programs* in Showcasing Public School Success by the Michigan Education Association.

The Guide

I know from experience that high school language arts teachers spend almost every waking moment of the school year planning, responding to student writing, and evaluating. We do not have time to sort through page after page of text to glean what we need for Monday morning's lesson. Most of the time, we're just hanging on by our fingernails. For this reason, I have tried to create a resource that gets right to the point and makes a multifaceted project like this easy to orchestrate.

Nearly all of the ideas I have included in this book have been created, tried, and revised over a period of about ten years. Although I've included lots of handouts and step-by-step instructions, I believe the teaching of this project should be in no way formulaic. The multigenre project should be all about exploration, innovation, and individuality. Like teaching in general, it is organic: Having a life of its own, it is constantly adapting, reproducing, and taking on new forms. Use what you like; then skip, adapt, and create your own versions as you have time and inclination.

The next eight chapters will take you step-by-step through the teaching of the multigenre unit: the assignment, research, genre and style, revision, cohesion, reflection and evaluation, and performance. Each of these chapters contains an overview of that portion of the process, followed by explanations of lessons. The reproducible or easily adaptable handouts are identified by chapter number and a letter. They can be found not only at the end of the chapter, but also on the accompanying CD. Almost all chapters contain samples of student work as well.

Chapter 10 provides the rationale for adopting the multigenre research project. Support from research and evidence of alignment with national and state standards validate the multigenre project's educational soundness.

Chapter 11 is a short chapter including a hypothetical schedule, some problems I have encountered, and methods of troubleshooting. Alternative plans for teaching the multigenre project complete the chapter on odds and ends.

The accompanying CD contains photos of student projects, handouts supplied as both PDFs and editable Word documents (identified by chapter number and a letter), and a complete example of a multigenre project.



The double-voice piece at the beginning of this chapter sprang from my imagination—these words from the heart of one of my students.

I feel that the multigenre project is the most wonderful project I've ever done. The fact that we get to choose what our project is about and what our project is made up of is awesome. There're hardly any limits to what we can do, and that is an awesome thing for my age . . . freedom is all we want, and to have homework that makes the sky our limit is the coolest.

—Tiffany Hayes
(Eleventh-grade student, Ithaca High School)



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