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NOKESVILLE, VIRGINIA—When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, high school ELA teacher, Andrea Yarbough, found her instruction thrown into a free fall. One of the biggest difficulties she encountered was the transition to four-day-per-week instruction. How was she to deliver a year’s worth of instruction with one less day each week? With time, she settled into a routine that worked, learning how to maximize student learning through careful lesson planning.

Ironically, what began as a challenge evolved into a blessing. Having spent years observing that her students responded enthusiastically to creative writing activities, Andrea had been seeking ways to implement more creative writing opportunities into her classroom. Curriculum pressures, however, led her to believe that such an approach was unrealistic.

Enter COVID-19.

When her school district temporarily moved to four-day instruction each week, Andrea saw an opportunity. For the first time, she imagined a classroom where weekly creative writing tasks were possible, a classroom where students spent four days on more traditional lessons and devoted the fifth to composition. But she knew that high student engagement wasn’t enough to justify the revolutionary change she was considering. The activities needed to be meaningfully connected to core learning strands. So she set to work over the summer designing lesson plan after lesson plan, ensuring that they addressed the key literacy skills she knew needed to be covered every year. In the end, she had a year’s worth of creative writing lesson plans, each aligned to core instruction, each designed with flexibility in mind, and each offering suggested unit integrations and extension activities to link the creative writing tasks to larger instructional units. She calls these writing lessons “Writing Wednesdays,” weekly explorations where students experiment with writing strategies in ways that formulaic approaches to composition prevent.

Since implementing Writing Wednesdays in her classes, Andrea has noticed a marked improvement in the level of thoughtfulness students are applying to their own writing, playing with genres and techniques that would have been unheard of in previous years. The students’ response has been overwhelmingly positive. One student, Emma, reflects, “I discovered the importance of attempting new writing techniques and incorporating those skills into my writing style to make me a stronger writer.” Her classmate, Mariam, shares the impact of Writing Wednesdays on her own relationship with writing, declaring, “...Now, I not only feel more confident in my ability as a writer, but I also enjoy it.”

The lessons employed with Andrea’s students can be found in her new book, *Artfulness: Formula-Free Creative Writing Explorations for Secondary ELA Classes*. Available at major online book retailers, Andrea is honored to have an opportunity to provide other teachers with the resources they need to

transition away from writing formulas in their classrooms. Alexandrite Publishing, LLC is proud to further assist educators on their journey towards more effective writing instruction through professional development workshops and an online community where educators can receive the training and support needed to successfully implement Writing Wednesdays into their own classes.