

# TLF Lesson Plan – Skyping with Authors to Increase Engagement in Writing and Reading

Author: Heather Cox

## **Literacy Standard(s):**

- **ELACC4RL10:** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- **ELACC4W7:** Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- **ELACC4W10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- **ELACC4SL1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
  - Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
  - **b.** Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
  - **c.** Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.

## **Technology Standard(s):**

- **ISTE-S2.** Communication and collaboration Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.
  - **d.** Interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
- **ISTE-S3.** Research and information fluency Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information.
- **ISTE-S5.** Digital citizenship Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.
  - **b.** Exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity
- **ISTE-T1.** Facilitate and inspire student learning and creativity Teachers use their knowledge of subject matter, teaching and learning, and technology to facilitate experiences that advance student learning, creativity, and innovation in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

- **b.** Engage students in exploring real-world issues and solving authentic problems using digital tools and resources
- **ISTE-T2.** Design and develop digital age learning experiences and assessments Teachers design, develop, and evaluate authentic learning experiences and assessments incorporating contemporary tools and resources to maximize content learning in context and to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes identified in the Standards•S.
  - **a.** Design or adapt relevant learning experiences that incorporate digital tools and resources to promote student learning and creativity

**Learning Targets:**

- I can generate insightful questions based upon research and knowledge from author-specific books.

**Objectives:**

- The student will read different texts by authors selected for Skype sessions. (ELACCRL10)
- The student will conduct simple research into an author’s background and writing history. (ELACC4W7)
- The student will generate questions for the Skype author using information gathered through research and readings. (ELACC4W7)
- The student will actively participate in the discussion either by asking questions or listening appropriately. (ELACC4SL1)

**Duration:**

- Preparation for the lesson should take at least one class period, but may take more depending on the depth in which you want them to research.
- The actual Skype session will last approximately 15-20 minutes.

**Materials:**

- Books written by the Skype author. Device or webcam with a Skype account. (Skype accounts can be created for free at their website.) Projector and connection cable (See “Teacher Notes” below.)

**Background Knowledge:**

- Students do not need any particular background knowledge before the first Skype session. Necessary knowledge will be obtained through the Skype preparation.

**Procedures:**

**HOOK:**

- Once an author is selected, introduce the students to this author by exposing them to one or more pieces of work written by this author.
- Conduct a website “investigation” to learn more about this author.
  - Be sure to read biographical information and other additional information where the author offers insight into why they made particular writing choices.
  - Encourage students to write “fat questions.” Fat questions are those that we need the author himself/herself to answer for us. If we can find it ANYWHERE on the author’s website, it is not a question that should be asked.
- Allow students to work independently to generate questions.
- Before Skype session, select student questions. Depending on the time limit, you may or may not get to all of the questions selected. During a 20 minute session, we typically moved through 15 questions.

**LESSON:**

- Before beginning the session, it is best that all students are seated appropriately and those with questions are near the front. Students should have questions printed and prepared in front of them.
- “Call” the author using Skype and begin your conversation.
- If questions/time allow, sometimes it is good for the teacher to ask extension questions throughout the session.

**CLOSING:**

- After concluding the Skype session, conduct a recap session of the authors major points. Recall information that supports the writing and reading curriculum in the classroom.

**Assessment:**

- Though much of the work will be done as a class, students can be assessed on the questions they generated.
  - Did they ask questions that could be easily answered online?
  - Did they ask questions that only the author would be able to answer?
  - Does the question promote further thinking?

**Intervention:**

- Some students may need more guidance in generating questions. These students may be assisted as needed.

**Extension:**

- The best extension activity is to continue holding Skype sessions with different authors. We enjoyed setting up two or three within a short time period to keep each session fresh in the students' minds.
- Participating in several different Skype sessions allows for students to compare and contrast the different authors.

### **Teacher Notes:**

- For every session, our class set the goal to have the author state, "That's a really good question" or "Those are great questions."
- Follow that author and others on Twitter. Develop a "relationship" to encourage better communication.
- The authors appreciate organization during the Skype session. Not only does it keep the class under control, but it allows you to get through more questions.
- It is recommended that you attach your iPad or other device to a projector and sound amplifier. This allows all students to clearly see and hear the author's comments.
- Because you may be limited to an iPad attached to a projector, it's best to set your question asking students in front of the iPad camera. It minimizes distractions and movement time between questions.
- If you're planning on conducting multiple Skype sessions, it is recommended that you choose authors who span different genres and levels. This promotes great discussion among the students.
- Encourage your students to read/check-out/buy books written by the author(s).
- Throughout the year, reference the authors and answers from the Skype session(s). This helps the students put their writing in the classroom into the context of real-life.

### **Setting Up and Author Skype Session:**

- Authors write books for readers which makes them very open to Skype sessions.
- Many offer free Skype Q&A sessions that last anywhere from 15-20 minutes. Because this is what authors do in addition to writing books, longer sessions may cost a fee.
- The best way to contact authors is through e-mail. Most will post contact information directly on their sites. If it directs you to a publisher's office/e-mail, it may be best to avoid or expect a longer wait.
- Author Kate Messner generates a list of author's who will Skype for free on World Read Aloud Day. This is a great starting point for authors to contact throughout the year. Find the list at [www.tinyurl.com/authorskype](http://www.tinyurl.com/authorskype).

- E-mail authors based upon their website requirements. Some authors request specific information, while others may be open-ended. Be honest with your request.
- Be sure you know your Skype name. You will exchange this with the author when your session is set.