

# Using the AlphaSmart in the Secondary Language Arts Classroom

## **“A is for Alaska” - Autobiographical Alphabet Books**

Students will begin with the letter A and think of something that relates to them using that letter – for example “I was born in Alaska”. Open up a file on the AlphaSmart and title that page “A is for Alaska” and follow with a paragraph that talks about being born in Alaska. Go to the printer and print out that page. For the second page of the book, they might title it “B is for Basketball” and follow that with a paragraph about their favorite sport of basketball. Continue this over a series of days until all the letters of the alphabet are used. They can bind their pages together to make their own bio-book. As enrichment, you can have students add their own art, or upload to a computer and add computer graphics to the pages.

## **“It’s in the Bag” - Character Development**

Teachers need to gather suitcases, baskets with lids, briefcase, book bags, etc. that can be given to each group of four students. Inside the bag or basket is a mixture of miscellaneous items to be used as clues for the “character.” (magazines, travel brochures, airline tickets, photos, music, keys, books, membership cards, etc.) Each group opens their bag and goes through every item, listing them in a file on the AlphaSmart. Discussions follow as to who the person might be, what their interests are, what is going on in their life right now, what they might do for a living, etc. After the ‘character’ is fully developed by the group, each student composes a written description of their person on their AlphaSmart. Group members compare descriptions and come to a group consensus on a description of their character. This can be extended into a larger project where the group writes a narrative using their person as a main character.

## **“Take the Day Off”**

Replace the tired writing assignment, ‘what is your favorite holiday and why’ with a much more enjoyable one – ‘Create your own holiday!’ With a partner, have students select a date and theme for their holiday. On the AlphaSmart, have them answer the following questions and give details about their new holiday. What is the purpose of the holiday? What are the colors of the holiday? How do people decorate their homes or dress to celebrate this day? What symbol(s) might represent this holiday? (ex: Santa and snowmen at Christmas, pumpkins and black cats at Halloween) Is this celebrated around the world or just in the United States? As an extension, you can have the pairs of students create a booklet advertising their holiday with their holiday colors and symbols used. The booklet should include the name, date, background, foods, clothes, etc.

## **“Virtues for Today”**

After reading Ben Franklin’s Autobiography and discussing his list of virtues to achieve perfection, ask the students to make a list of virtues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Working in groups, have each group type in a list of 10 virtues. Each virtue has to have a title and a description/definition. After the group has developed their list, have them upload their file into a master file that, ideally, is projected for the class to see. Have the entire class look at the list collections and choose the 3 virtues he or she feels is most important. Give points to those with the most votes and narrow the long list down to a class list of virtues. Print the list out for each student. Have them keep a log for a week and mark down each time a virtue was not obeyed. At the end of the week, have them open a file on the AlphaSmart and write about their experiences of the week and anything they learned.

## **“Let’s Go Shopping” – Point of View**

Have students open a file on the AlphaSmart and make a list of all the different people they would see at a shopping mall on a Saturday afternoon (kids, security guards, sales clerks, janitors, mall walkers, researchers, senior citizens, etc) After they have brainstormed independently, form a class list on the board so you have many choices. Tell them to choose one of these characters and visualize what that person might be doing at the mall. Clear space in your room and tell the kids to actually simulate their character, making your class the shopping mall. Encourage kids to really get into the role. After about 2 minutes, making sure they are really ‘into’ their character, slam the door or drop a really heavy book on the floor, making a loud noise. Explain to them that a huge explosion has just occurred. Tell them to return to their desks, open a file on their AlphaSmart, and write what just happened and how they would react to it from the point of view of the character they are pretending to be. Allow them to write 5-10 minutes and then share their writing with small groups. Each group can share one of the writings with the entire class. Try to get a variety of points of view.

## **“The Personal Touch” – Expository Writing**

The teacher approaches each student and, without a word, touches each one’s hand in a different way. One might get a ‘power’ handshake, another a ‘high five’, another a hand jive, another a ‘pinkie link’, another a soft stroke on the back of the hand, another clasp hands and swing playfully, etc. Students then open a file on the AlphaSmart and write about their personal touch as clearly as possible so that a reader of their paragraph(s) could demonstrate the touch the writer has received. Encourage them to write how the touch made them feel as well as a description of the actual physical action. Have students randomly exchange AlphaSmarts, read the paragraph and try to replicate the hand action. If students are unsuccessful, the writer can go back and revise the paragraph to make it clearer to the reader. Ask for volunteers to read their finished products.

## **The Writing Blitz – Prewriting Fun**

Deliver one direction every forty seconds:

1. Write a nine-word sentence with an animal in the fifth position.
2. Arrange the following ideas in one sentence – old man, rain, tractor, coal mine.
3. Write a sentence that contains at least thirteen ‘t’s.
4. Write a five-word sentence with each word starting with the letter M.
5. Write a question that includes these four words – girl, street, clear, today

## **Power Writing – More Prewriting Fun**

Write the words ‘eagle’ and ‘carrot’ on the board. Have students open a file on the AlphaSmart, choose one of the words and begin writing as much as they can about that word for one minute. Call time and ask them to count the number of words they have written. Type that number in at the bottom of the file. Open a different file on the AlphaSmart. Have them choose between two new words, ‘umbrella’ or ‘beautiful’. Repeat the process of having them write for a minute, count the words and record. Do this one more time with the words ‘sock’ or ‘blue’. It will become dramatically apparent from the word counts that this activity promotes thinking and writing in quantity. Practicing quantity is an important part of a comprehensive writing program because learners learn to write mostly by writing!