

## Episode 408: Preparing for Unit Six Transcript

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Julie Walker:** So, Andrew, today, Unit 6. I know this is one of your favorite units because it's on the more factual side.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It also kind of solves the problem of how to teach kids to do research and write reports and avoid that horrific note card pile and research project that took six, eight weeks. And people got in one end of the shoot and made it out the other and had no idea what they actually did.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Well, I remember doing one of those reports. I think the first one I did, I think I was in fifth grade. And the next one I did, I was in seventh grade. So, my first one was on raccoons because that's my favorite animal. Don't ask me why I think raccoons are so cute, and they got little hands.

**Andrew Pudewa:** now I know what to get you for your birthday.

**Julie Walker:** Please don't give me a raccoon.

**Andrew Pudewa:** A raccoon. In a cage,

**Julie Walker:** I do remember getting the books and writing the little note cards and definitely being overwhelmed with the process. Every student in the class picked a different animal to do a report on. And I know you have a story of a teacher kind of using that idea of every student picking their own topic and trying to do a Unit 6 on it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. And that's why I think a lot of teachers kind of just assume that for this to be interesting or for this to be valid, every student has to choose their own, whatever animal, country, president, explorer, whatever. And then they have to figure this all out on their own and that may or may not work.

I think the story that you are imagining, which I experienced, was when I was living in Idaho and I was working with the Pasco, Washington school district. And I had been down there a lot. I had trained every teacher in the elementary, which in their district went up through grade five, I believe, maybe grade six. But they were really trying hard. But one of the things about Pasco is it has a very high percentage of second language learners. There's an agricultural kind of migrant population that kind of comes and goes. They have a very high turnover rate in the school. So it's a difficult teaching situation for the teachers. But they were open minded. They had been to trainings. I had gone in to do demonstration classes, and I was making another trip down to Pasco, and one of the teachers found out I was coming.

“Oh, would you please, please come to my class? We're trying to do Unit 6 and it's really, it's tough. It's not going great.”

And so, I thought, wow, this is fantastic. A teacher who made it to Unit 6. That's right there, a joy. And so we scheduled that, and I came in and her situation was basically where she had kind of tried to show the kids how to do it all. And then encouraged them to choose a president, and she had a classroom set of little paperbacks that were like presidents of the United States or something and it had a chapter, short chapter about all the presidents. And then she had got them to the library where they had got other books that had information about their president or a book that was specific to their president. So all the kids had a nice little stack of three books on their desktop, and this was really pre-internet days. So it wasn't a case where she was having to deal with kids just googling information and cutting and pasting and all that.

But she'd been at this a couple weeks, and all the kids were basically just kind of floundering. They didn't know what to do, and she kept trying to re-explain what to do. And it just wasn't working. And so she was frustrated, rightly so. So when I figured out the problem, I said, okay, I will do what I can and you will get through this. You will make it through. But, next year, do it differently. Don't have every kid choose their own president. You choose one president. Don't have every kid with a different pile of books. You choose three source texts. One of the problems with second language learners is very often they pick a book from the library because maybe they can read the title, but then they discover it's really hard to use. So, you choose the source texts and get them to be at or below the reading level of the students. And, I don't know, you may even have to write some down to their level, I'm not sure, but what you need to do is you need to have everyone with the same president, the same set of source text, you choose the same topic, and you walk them through this line by line. You just do the whole first topic together.

**Julie Walker:** Together. Yep.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's the only way they're really going to kind of get it. You can explain this ten more times, and it's still not going to click; they need to do it with you. And then once you've got that one topic, yeah, everybody's paragraph is going to be very similar in its content. No, it's fine. You're not looking at the product. You're looking at the process.

**Julie Walker:** You've said that before.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's what you're teaching. Then you'll do the same present with a second topic and give them a little bit less help. Like do the source outlines together, right? So a short little outline from two or three, four different sources, whatever you have, and then let them try the fused outline part and write up from the fused outline. So you give them not quite as much help, but you're still doing it together, and everyone's pretty much doing the same thing, and that's okay. Then you've got a second paragraph. Then you've got a third topic. This time, don't do the source outlines together. See if they can create the source outlines and the fused outline and write that paragraph and then just run around and help everybody if they're stuck.

And now you'll have three paragraphs that are on three topics all about the same president. Save those. Those are going to be the body paragraphs for your first Unit 8 assignment.

And if you've got that all done and you have any time or energy left over, then maybe give them all a chance to learn about a different president and try that process themselves, but we, I think very often we just make the mistake of assuming if we explain something, everybody should be able to do it. And then when they can't, we're frustrated. They're frustrated. Everybody's frustrated. Whereas if we just do stuff together, then they learn how, and there's this tight loop of modeling and trying it. And then the teaching goes much, much better, especially when you're dealing with a population for whom English is difficult to begin with.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Now, I'm sitting here listening to the story, and I know you said several times, explain the process, do the process together, work through the process, and I'm trying to decide whether or not to ask you to explain the process because we don't have a lot of time.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. Well,

**Julie Walker:** All of this is explained in detail, of course, in our teacher training course.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And, and we're not assuming that people are going to just listen to the podcast and be like, Oh, now I know everything about teaching Unit 6, but for people who are new to our system—Unit 6 is kind of an expansion of Unit 4, where we teach the idea of topic-based paragraphs. You have a subject, you divide it into topics, you make a keyword outline from not all the facts available on a topic, some of the facts. That's why it's called summarizing (some-a-rizing).

**Andrew Pudewa:** And that's Unit 4. So Unit 6 adds a complexity of having more than one source of information with too many facts. Now you have several sources of information with too many facts. So it's kind of like you're going to choose your topics, go to your source text, choose 3–5 facts on that topic from that source text. And again, it doesn't matter how many are there. There could be 5, there could be 10, there could be 50, there could be 500. It doesn't matter how many facts are available. You choose 3 to 5, and going to the Unit 4 criterion idea, what's interesting, important, or if the kids can understand the idea, relevant to the whole.

And so you can do two or more source outlines. And then you have the added step of creating a fused outline from the source outlines where you kind of choose the best of the best. And then, once you've got the fused outline, that's where you stick the word clincher down at the bottom, and then you write a paragraph from the outline.

One of the things, and people who are not yet familiar with our system, one of the things that people assume is that kids should be able to make outlines on their own and that the writing from the outline is harder. In my experience, it's actually the opposite. Once you've got the outline, writing that into sentences isn't the hardest part of the task.

The harder part is collecting up, deciding what to use, organizing into a logical sequence, and creating the outline. So that's where more modeling is going to benefit more greatly. And if you're in Unit 6, that kind of indicates you've done Units 3 and 4 and 5. So, at this point, looking at a key word outline and thinking how to make that into sentences, this is something that is well practiced. It's the new element of how to create the outline that is where the most help and modeling will be of the greatest benefit.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. So I know as you were describing the teachers, the teacher that you worked with in Pasco that was many, many years ago, and she was pretty much forced to come up with her own source texts. And of course, today we've helped teachers by creating contrived source texts.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That was one of the very first things that Webster created was the mini books. And we use the elephant minibooks, of course, in the TWSS. For years, I used sets of minibooks as source text for the Student Writing Intensive, which, of course, is now retired happily and replaced with much, much better. And we have all the theme based books, and so the idea for the mini books and the contrived source texts that we provide for Unit 6 isn't to replace the library or replace what someone might call real sources. These are contrived to make it easy for you to teach the process. So, if this teacher had, I think, used mini books with animals instead of presidents, she could have taught the process more easily. And the mini books, and of course all of our source texts come, they're written at a grade level that is hopefully appropriate to the target audience. And you just can't be sure about books and internet sources and things. In fact, I was helping a granddaughter write a report last night. And it wasn't Unit 6, it was more Unit 4. And she's very young. She's just reading, pretty simple, just turned 8. And she wanted to write about St. Monica, who is the mother of St. Augustine. And the problem was that all of the internet sources that I found were way above her reading level.

And so, we're just slogging through, slogging through. So, I basically just read each sentence to her and said, do you like this one? And if she said yes, then I would make the outline. And then once we had five sentences, then she could write those into sentences. And of course, the harder to spell words were there all ready to go in the outline. And so she got a little taste of the process, we had done it before with some other thing a few months ago, and she got a little taste of the process. And then the result was she felt like, yes, this was my little report on this person. And she was very happy and proud and for her, mostly, it was remembering to, because she's writing in cursive, dot her i's and cross her t's and figure out periods and remember to make a capital at the beginning of the sentence. And the funny thing was too, she said to me, can you just tell me how to spell the words? Because if I look at it, And then I look away, I forget it. I thought that was so smart, because she would start to write the word, and, so I did. I'd spell the words for her while she was writing, especially some of the harder to spell.

**Julie Walker:** With cursive she doesn't have to lift up her pen.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. And so looking away at the outline and whatnot. But she's going to do great. And at that age, a little bit goes a long ways.

You know how when you're young, and you do something, you know how to do it for your whole life. You go fishing two times with your grandpa when you're seven years old, you know how to fish. If you don't do it when you're young, then you never really get that same level of confidence. So, it's a delight to have kind of a low stress way to help a granddaughter write a little report on a person.

**Julie Walker:** So you had mentioned that the process with this teacher that you were recommending, it sounds like very different from the one report that I did in fifth grade and the other report that I did. You're recommending that they do multiple research projects.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. In fact, when I teach the Unit 6, when I introduce it on the TWSS, I, I assume I said, because I usually say what we want to do is we want to be able to do a complete research project in two, two and a half hours. Beginning to end. Total amount of time. Now, it will be very short. Like, one paragraph. But, if we can get that done, then we go through the whole process. Then we can go through the whole process again. Go through the whole process again. And you can spend your however much time you have—6, 7, 8, 10 hours, or whatever you're going to squeeze out of 3 or 4 weeks of doing Unit 6. You can do that process many times and understand the process so that when you're older and someone says, now you have to write this great huge long thing, you understand that a great huge long thing is really just a whole bunch of short things, and you can knock it off one paragraph at a time.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. So I have recently had the assignment from our curriculum team to write some Unit 6 source texts. And this is for curriculum that we're selling. Just two examples that I'm going to share and then a third one. *Wonders of Science*. I wrote the Unit 6 source text that they, of course, massaged and edited and make sure that it fit appropriately. But I learned so much as I was writing about these.

**Andrew Pudewa:** What were you writing about?

**Julie Walker:** Nikola Tesla was one of my people. Einstein. which is really interesting today because there's a lot more conversation about Einstein and what he did and did not do. And then also Maria Telkes, uh, the sun goddess. She's the one that was one of the pioneers of solar energy. So these were, I did not know anything about the sun queen. I think that's what she's called, the sun queen.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's probably better.

**Julie Walker:** I had no idea who she was and what she did and how solar actually first started had nothing to do with these flat glass panels. They were basically a way to heat up water and salt and that powered things. So, I just find, and I think this extends on to what now as the students are writing about these and using the *Wonders of Science* curriculum, they're learning a lot more about this topic because they're writing about it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely. In fact, I get a lot of letters from kids, sometimes more than I can keep up with in terms of answering them, because I have to, I have to be careful to include dress ups and openers.

**Julie Walker:** I suppose you do.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I have to write neatly and be a good example for these children, but one of the common themes that kids will tell me other than I like your program, or your jokes are good, or the other kids in the class are funny, is, I enjoy learning about—, and then they'll say a few of their favorite subjects, like the hooded pitahui.

**Andrew Pudewa:** An actual poisonous bird or Bactrian camels are the difference between the dromedaries and the Bactrians. So it's interesting how they will point out to me certain little obscure things that they really enjoyed from, say, the whole course. And it just reminds

me of the fact that knowing stuff is fun, right? I mean, you learned about Tesla and Einstein and Telkes and now you know more and you're happy.

**Julie Walker:** exactly. I am happy, and so the other book I wanted to recommend or comment on is our new book that we did in partnership with Hillsdale College K 12 program. And this is *Adventures in Writing*, and we only have two Unit 6 assignments in that because it's

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's a beginning,

**Julie Walker:** beginning, right? So I wrote

**Andrew Pudewa:** grade 3, 4, right?

**Julie Walker:** zso two topics I had, two different subjects, two different assignments.

The Roanoke Native Americans, and that, I didn't really talk much about the mystery there, just mostly focused on the Native Americans and how they lived and that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** the mystery was like how the colony completely just vaporized,

**Julie Walker:** but I didn't get into that because that was too big for this level. But the way they fished—they lit fires in their canoes and I mean, this was fascinating to me; of course, if it's fascinating to me, I'm sure that the kids are going to love this too. So I include that. And but then the other source text I wrote for *Adventures in Writing*—and again, these were massaged and made to work well in the book, so they're not necessarily my writing anymore—but was the *Mayflower*. And why that was of interest to me is because I'm descended from people on the *Mayflower*, and that ship was so small, Andrew. I mean, I'm pretty sure that the boats that we grew up sailing when we were teenagers in Southern California were not much smaller than the *Mayflower*. Okay, maybe a little bit, but very tiny and to have over 100 people on there. And it just the winds and the waves and battered and that comes out, of course, in the text. And I, the latest one that I'm working on right now, and what I love about this, and listener, you may be hearing my enthusiasm, I am learning so much about American history, the French and Indian War. It was the French fighting the Indians. No, that's not what it is at all.

**Andrew Pudewa:** No, it was the French and the Indians.

**Julie Walker:** Fighting the British and the Indians. So there's another piece to that. It's like, okay, well, how did this all work? And basically the thread of George Washington and where he got started. And then I just learned this, and this is not in the source text, but I just learned that there's a discrepancy of how old he was. Was he 21 when he was going to the Ohio Valley and trying to resolve this conflict by taking over the area for the British, or was he 22?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, that's not a huge difference.

**Julie Walker:** Well, it's not a huge difference, but the reason why there's a discrepancy, even though this happened 300 years ago, was the Gregorian calendar. The way time was tracked, you could give a defense that he was 22. You could give a defense he was 21. So, we went with 22, and hopefully people won't take issue with it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, yeah, I mean, in today's world, you can't really say anything without somebody challenging that. It's pretty tough. That's why I think older encyclopedias are handy to have around?

**Julie Walker:** Well, you know who's else learning a lot about these topics? My husband.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, because you're talking about it.

**Julie Walker:** I'm telling him, did you know? Did you know? And he actually enjoys history himself. And so he'll say, well, yes, I knew that, but I didn't know.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But I think it underscores the fact that knowing things and in particular writing about things, that's what brings it to life. I've had so many cases where I knew a story, or I knew this poem, or I knew information, but when I had to write it, then, it was like I had to understand it at a completely, I don't know, more solid, deeper, more meaningful. And children have this same experience.

**Julie Walker:** I want to mention, because I didn't mention this, I don't want our listeners to be confused. I talked about *Wonders of Science*. That was the Einstein kind of like electricity theme. Then I talked about *Adventures in Writing*, and then *Discoveries in Writing* was the third one where we're talking about George Washington and the French and Indian War.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. And this is part of our new series. That is aligned with the Hillsdale K 12 curriculum map, but they're available to any anybody homeschool, other schools, any school.

**Julie Walker:** Any final comments about Unit 6 as we're wrapping this up?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well a lot of people are kind of worried that somehow what we do is not sophisticated enough for older students, middle school or high school students. But I had an interesting experience right here in this building. One of the students that made videos with us, Lydia, and she was in the Level B. And a couple years after that was all finished. Now she's in high school. She's sitting in the commons area here in the office. 'cause her dad works there and she has a big 11 by 17 sheet of paper. And a couple books and a pile of printed out stuff. And she's using this 11 by 17 sheet of paper exactly the same way we did in the Unit 6 lessons.

**Julie Walker:** For *Structure and Style for Students*, we show how to use that big piece of paper.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So I stopped by. I said, Oh, what are you working on? And she says, I have to write a speech. And I said, Oh, so you're, you're using the Unit 6 idea to write your speech? She goes, Of course. And to me, that's kind of a nice little answer because, well, that's the way she learned to do it, but it's totally scalable. You can do it with fourth grade kids. You can also use that method for advanced high school or college writing. And the paper management system is the external representation of what gradually becomes internalized in terms of this way to collect up facts from various places and then prioritize and organize into a fused set of facts and then write from that and just do it one topic at a time.

And so I've had many experiences where the things that we taught to kids when they were younger were still being used by them, not even because there was a requirement, but because that was the way they learned. And is still the best way they know to do it. So I just encourage everyone don't think that anything in our syllabus is too simplistic. It can be done

and used from the earlier grades all the way up through advanced levels, even graduate level research in school, I think. There's that application of the methodology of thinking through things. And that's a lifetime gift.

**Julie Walker:** Well, thank you, Andrew.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Google podcasts, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.