

Kristie Ennis

Look Back, Looking Ahead: January Letters 45 min

Objective:

In this lesson, we will examine the history of New Year's Resolutions, the god Janus, and the idea of reflecting upon one's past in order to look positively ahead to one's future in order to write their own January Letters to themselves. Then, next year at this time, they can open the letters to see what they accomplished.

Big Idea:

Students will research and discuss the history of New Year's Resolutions.

Students will write reflective letters to themselves.

1. Warm Up / Anticipatory 10 min

To begin, all students and teachers should take a few minutes to respond in writing to the following questions:

- Why do people make New Year's resolutions?
- What types of New Year's resolutions do people make?
- How did the tradition of New Year's resolutions get started? (If you don't know, make your best guess)

Then, the teacher should model by sharing one of his/her answers to one of the questions. The teacher can then choose several students to share their answers, so that a general sense of the prior knowledge of the class can be taken. These impressions can be recorded for reference throughout the process if that's useful (like on chart paper or the board).

Resources

- http://wg.wonderopolis.org/uploads/users/63/293/January_letter.doc

2. Investigation and New Learning 20 min

First, show the video attached to the wonder to get the students engaged in new thinking.

Next, students should explore the wonder individually or in pairs, to discover new information about New Year's Resolutions. [Wonder of the Day #90](#). If technology allows (or using printed copies), also ask students to expand their research by accessing one of the links to sources on the Wonder of the Day.

While exploring, students should record their new discoveries on sticky notes (one thing per note), and add it to one central place in the classroom. If they see someone has already placed this piece of knowledge on the central space, they should not duplicate it. In this way, only ONE of each sticky with a new discovery on it should be in the central space. It might look something like the brainstorming web below. In this way, the discovery process becomes visual. For purposes of tracking/assessment, it might be a good idea to give each group a different color sticky note.

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3. Review & Check for Understanding 30 min

In order to gauge understanding, the teacher can review the sticky notes to see that students have gleaned information needed to demonstrate new knowledge of New Year's resolutions.

To extend, students will then write their own resolutions in the form of a January letter to themselves. The assignment is attached to this.

Note: A great way to make this meaningful is to actually ask the students to seal the letters, address them to themselves, and have them delivered NEXT January. It is an excellent process of reflection and is particularly important when the students move on to a new school or grade (like graduation from 8th or 12th grade). I actually mailed them after graduation to my former students. It was emotional and awesome.