

Session 4 Transcript: Michelle Simmons

- Hey everyone, my name is Michelle Simmons. I've been teaching for nine years and I currently teach Fifth Grade Science and Social Studies, in Pensacola, Florida. I also write for The Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM. Welcome to my classroom. So today I'm going to be sharing with you one of my all time favorite projects I've ever done, and that is using podcasts as a tool for assessment. If you've been living under a rock and you don't know what a podcast is, podcasts are a digital audio file that can be downloaded off the internet. There are a ton of podcasts out there and pretty much anyone is able to find a podcast that they enjoy. They range from fact to fiction, and everything in between. I personally love a True Crime podcast. Last June, Susan Riley did an article on how to incorporate podcasts in the classroom. This was really a jump start for me, and it really gave me a base of how I could form this project in my head. My favorite way to use podcasts is a tool for authentic assessment. So what that means is, my students are actually writing and producing their own podcast. Undertaking podcasts in your classroom may seem like this huge feat. But really it's just like anything else, you can make it as complicated as you want it to be, or as simple as you want it. All right, so let's walk through step-by-step now, so you can see exactly how I accomplished creating podcasts with my Fifth Graders. One of the very first things that I do, is when I am planning, I purposely plan podcasts the go along with my lessons in units. I can see that this project is on the horizon and a lot of my students would not have the background, if I didn't build it for them. So I purposefully put these in to build that background, before we get to the project. So, I wanna make sure that my students know what a podcast is, what one sounds like and the general idea behind the purpose for writing a podcast. So a couple of the one's that I have used in my classroom are Brains On and Tumble for Science. And then stuff you missed in History class and kid friendly, History Fun Facts. All of these are really easy to listen to and my students really did enjoy them. I would use them at different places in my lessons, sometimes I would use them as a grabber, especially some of the short ones. And then sometimes I would use them kind of as a culminating listening activity and we would write about it. What did we hear? What did we not learn in our textbook that we learned in the podcast. So use these in a variety of ways. The main thing was is that I wanted to build this background so when we got to the project, my kids knew what we were talking about. Feel like I need to stop and time out for a second, and give a public service announcement. Always listen to whatever you are going to play in a classroom. You do not wanna have the, oh no moment, when you are listening to something that you think is age appropriate and it turns out that it's not. Just trust me on this, okay . Okay, so after you've built background, you're ready to start recording your podcast, right? Wrong, as you're building back ground, what you need to do is teach your content. And I know you're sitting there probably thinking well duh, I need to teach my content. But just hear me out for a second. In my classroom this was designed to be a culminating activity. Which meant I wanted my students to be able to showcase full understanding of the topic that they had chosen. So, it was important to me to build a base knowledge of the content before I even threw the podcast at them. So this truly was a culminating activity. So after I had taught the content, that is when we started working on our podcast. The first thing that I did was I picked the broad topic which

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was Early Settlements. And I broke that into two smaller topics, which were Plymouth and Jamestown. From there, the students paired off with somebody that they could work with, and they picked an even smaller topic based on the two larger topics. And some of the students even didn't even go any smaller, they chose Jamestown or Plymouth. Some of them however did wanna choose a more specific topic, like The Mayflower, and I allowed them to do that. So after they paired off and they picked their topic, what they did was they started researching five facts. Now, my Fifth Graders are extremely guilty of falling down the black hole of the internet. What do I mean, the black hole? The internet is a wonderful, fabulous place, but for a Fifth Grader, the internet can be full of information that they don't truly understand. Facts and names and figures come out from everywhere and they do not know how to process all of that information. So for this very reason, I wanted to keep their research very, very constrained and tight. So I told them they had to use our Social Studies resource, which in my district, we use the Studies Weekly, and they just simply look like this. So we had a paper on Plymouth and we had a paper on Jamestown. And they were told that they could use anything out of the newspaper, and then if they found that they had further questions, I would help them research. And this was a really good activity for my students because they started to understand how to research specific questions. So for example, I had a group of students who were researching The Mayflower. In their paper, it never told them how many people were actually on The Mayflower. And they said, "Well this is important, I need to know how many people were on the boat, so that when we land in Plymouth we know kind of what we're working with." And so then from there, I showed them how to research specific questions and this was just one of many examples of where the research, something very small, it guided them into more specific research. It was a very good activity for my students. After they found five facts and I approved them, I wanted to make sure that all the facts went together, kind of were the same topic, same theme, and we did have to work on that just a little bit. Then they were allowed to start writing their script. You're getting the outline of the script that my students used. And so from there we had a conversation. I did a mini lesson on how people take topics in a podcast and they build on that into just conversation. It doesn't need to be, just list five facts. That's boring, nobody wants to listen to that. So how can we take a topic and turn it into a conversation? And that was something that my students tended to struggle with. However, there were quite a few students who really grasped onto this and did extremely well and they were able to help their peers. So there was some partner learning going on that was an unintended side effect of this project. Now that our scripts are done, it's finally time to record, right? Not quite yet. Now it is time to practice, practice, practice. So this is the moment where we stopped, and I gave some direct instruction on speaking techniques. My Fifth Graders still struggle greatly with public speaking, I know a lot of adults who still struggle with public speaking. So they needed direct instruction. I really made them focus on what was the purpose of their writing? Enjoyment, podcasts are to be enjoyed. And so your speaking strategies and techniques need to reflect that. So proper speed, proper pauses, inflection, laughing, if somebody says a joke it's okay to laugh, their partner can laugh at them. And so we really practiced a lot. I would go around to

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each group and get feedback as they were working. So you just responded that they got off track, and you're like, well why did they even go if the weather was bad, if they knew it? So that's the point you're trying to make. Does that make sense?

- Mm hmm.

- Okay.

- , my names , and I'm happy .

- Yeah , I'm really excited to talk to our listeners about Mayflower.

- Once I felt that they had a pretty solid base, then it was time for them to start working with the equipment. And I'm sure that's been your number one question since I've started this, is what equipment did she use to record these podcasts? Well I wanted my students to have real podcasting equipment, I wanted it to be an authentic experience. So I started researching. Podcast equipment costs anywhere from around 50 dollars on up. I didn't have an extra 50 dollars laying around, so I wrote a Donors Choose Grant, and I was fortunate enough to get that funded. But if you don't have a grant, if your school doesn't have the funds to pay for it, you can use your computers internal microphone and a couple of apps to get these recorded. One of the apps is Audacity, one is Anchor, and then the one that I used was GarageBand. So, my donors choose was about three, 400 dollars. And what that got me was, it got me headphones, so they had their headphones that they could use, it got me an amp, so for my headphones so they could adjust the sound, and it also got me this microphone with the mesh on the front that we were able to record on. And let me tell you, every time the student's put the headphones on and said one word, their smiles were contagious. They were so thrilled to be using that microphone and listening to themselves. And it is such an unusual sound to hear yourself that way, that I wanted to make sure that they had plenty of time to practice and just play on it, just be a kid for a little bit. So they got to make silly sounds and we just messed around. Every group got to come to the microphone with their headphones and play around for a second. What they also got to do was practice their podcast. Now I had set a time length, it needed to be between three and five minutes. That is the one thing that most of my students struggled with, was getting to that three minute mark. But it was important to me that they had a time to shoot for. So when we were working, when we were just playing with it, that really allowed me to give them some good, honest feedback. Okay, you're at two minutes and 30 seconds. Where can we add another sentence on to what we're already talking about? Where can we add a pause for emphasis? That's a couple of seconds. What can we do to change this up? So it gave me time to work with each of my students while they were getting comfortable with the materials, with the equipment, and they were allowed to go back, change up their scripts just a little bit, before we were recording. This was really the most beneficial thing that

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we did throughout the project. That direct feedback right before they were about to record really seemed to help every student. So, now it's time to record. After I gave them that feedback and gave them about a day to make some edits to their script based on what we talked about, then we sat them down, we had to have a good audience talk where you have to be quiet because the microphone's gonna pick up everything, and we recorded our podcast. This was truly a great experience for my students, they enjoyed this tremendously.

- Is a phone call,

- Is a phone call,

- from the past.

- From the past. Hey everyone, thanks for tuning in. My name's Lavern and I'm happy to today. We have a great podcast planned.

- Yeah Lavern, I am really excited to talk to our listeners today about da, da, da, da, The Mayflower.

- Ah man, I wanted to say that Lynae.

- Creating this podcast turned out to be one of the best projects I've ever done in my years of teaching. The students really showed out. As I said, I teach Fifth Grade, Fifth Grade Inclusion. So a lot of my students have learning disabilities, so I saw students who were reluctant writers asking to pull out their script and work on it. Tell me, oh last night when I was at home, I had this great idea of how I could talk about this. It was truly incredible to see that creativity blossom in students who normally don't get to shine. One of my favorite examples of this, is I had two girls use the quote from John Smith, "Those who do not work, do not eat." And she flipped it around and she said, "Man I'm glad my mom hasn't made that rule at my house." And I thought it was so cute and it was so relevant to a Fifth Grade girl, and this was somebody who normally stays to herself, that was really blossoming with this project. And it was just really eye opening for them to see how their learning could be relevant. This was such a relevant topic, they love listening to podcasts in the classroom and so by turning it around and them writing their own, they were hooked. Now, I'm a Fifth Grade, so Upper Elementary. So if you're sitting there and you teach Senior English, how can you use this? One of the reasons why I love podcasts is that it's literally the ultimate tool. So whether you're a Senior English Teacher, or a Kindergarten Teacher, there are ways for you to use this in your classroom. So, I've come up with a few ideas and you can expand on them to reach your classroom. But for reading, character commentary, how awesome would it be if each character of a novel or a story had their own podcast. And so you could really change that point of view up. In Science I thought

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about Chemistry and the Periodic Table each kind of episode is a different element. And what properties they have and what they do in our world. The same thing, you could track through body systems. Social Studies are endless, specific Historical Event. The Olympics are about to come up and so I thought what a fun way, you could do a whole podcast on the Olympics and track the sports and the teams that are winning. In Math, you know the different geometric shapes and where you can find them in the real world. How do you use Math in the real world? You can use this literally any way. Now if you're using this for older students, obviously you're gonna give them a little more freedom and a little more responsibility at that too. So maybe your student is required to do multiple episodes. My podcasts were relatively short, three to five minutes is nothing in podcast world. So you could definitely bump up the length and bump up the requirements for facts and topic ideas, and really stretch this into the High School level. For our little babies, so below me and Elementary School, you could do a whole class podcast. And each little one have one line to come up and say into the microphone and kind of put together and build a podcast that way. It is literally the ultimate tool, there's just so many options that you can explore with this. I wanna thank everybody for journeying into my classroom and letting me share this project with you, and share my students with you. They are an amazing group of kids who I'm gonna miss this next year, and if you have any questions, please feel free to ask, I'll be around all day. And I would love to chat with you more about this. Until then, happy podcasting, bye.