

Lisa Bullard

TIME CAPSULE ACTIVITY ****Now revised to work with distance learning, too!****

This Time Capsule activity has been revised to work as an engaging multi-part activity in either an in-person or a distance-learning environment. It gives students insights into understanding themselves and others, and teaches them a tactic they can incorporate into their own writing process for both fiction or nonfiction.

Part 1: Time Capsule Scavenger Hunt

1. Explain to the students what a Time Capsule is.
2. Tell students they are going to create personal Time Capsules. Their school backpack or a paper grocery bag will serve as the container.
3. *Optional step:* Educators who want to take things to the next level can have students design and decorate their Time Capsule containers. The starting point for this might be a cardboard box, a plastic container, or a paper grocery bag.
4. Tell students that the assignment is to go on a “scavenger hunt” throughout their own homes to find items for their Time Capsule. Each student will collect several items that reveal something important about them. (Assign the number of items based on the age of the students. I recommend anywhere from 5-15 items total.)
5. Explain that their items need to fit into their Time Capsule container. Encourage students to be thoughtful in their selection and to choose items that help tell the story of who they are as a person.
6. Examples might include a family photograph, a pet toy, a sports trophy, a great report card, a scouting badge, sheet music for an instrument, a beloved book, a well-loved clothing item, a souvenir from a vacation, a hand-drawn picture, a favorite (shelf-stable) snack, jewelry, a worn-out toy. For certain items, students can instead draw a picture or take a photo – this includes items that are too large to fit the container, food that might spoil, and living pets (no hamsters should be harmed in the execution of this activity!).
7. Let students know that they will be sharing their items, so they may want to avoid very private objects and should only include classroom-appropriate items.

Part 2: Show-and-Tell

1. Once students have had enough time to put their Time Capsules together, organize a show-and-tell session (in person or virtual) where students get to share their Time Capsules (you may need to limit the number of items each student shares).

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2. Before students begin sharing, encourage them to pay close attention to the items shared by their classmates. Explain that the objects an individual chooses to represent themselves can give insights into who they are as a person. You may want to ask students to predict an item that someone else will be sure to have included: "I know for sure Jacob will have a baseball because he's such a big fan!" But remind them that their classmates may also reveal surprises by sharing unexpected items.
3. Conduct the show-and-tell.
4. When students have finished sharing their items, ask them to share their impressions. What did they anticipate correctly? What surprised them? What new things did they learn about their classmates? How might this activity help them to observe and better understand other people in their lives: family members, neighbors, friends?

Part 3: Follow-up Writing Activity: Create a Character Time Capsule

1. This activity is flexible and can be used to help students develop/explore an interesting character they will feature in different kinds of writing. Here are examples:
 - Have students create a fictional character to star in their next story.
 - Have students explore the life of a real person they will feature in a biographical report.
 - Have students create a Time Capsule for their favorite character from a book as a twist on a traditional book report.
2. Explain to students that they are going to create a Time Capsule for a character they will then feature in a written piece. Add further details based on what kind of writing you have chosen from the list above or elsewhere.
3. For their Character Time Capsule, students don't need to collect actual objects. Instead, they can write up a list of items or create a collage of pictures of the objects.
4. Remind students that the goal is to choose objects that reveal important things about the character: objects that represent the things that have helped shape the character's life; the things the character loves; the things that reveal the role the character plays in the world; items that illuminate what the character values most. Understanding those elements will help the student bring the character to life when they begin writing.
5. Point out to students that the Character Time Capsule creates an excellent opportunity to explore not only character, but also another important writing ingredient: setting. Encourage students to also include objects that reveal the time and the place where their character lives.

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6. Once students have finished creating their Character Time Capsules, encourage them to use them as a resource while they move on to writing the story or report you have assigned. They will likely find that they now closely identify with their character. Having done this deep exploration into what makes up their character will also help jumpstart their writing process and make the writing of their story or report go much more smoothly.