



# Teaching through Entrepreneurship

## SUMMARY

What ingredients make a good unit great? In this article, fourth-grade teachers share how they elevate and engage their students' learning through an entrepreneur unit that combines collaborative planning, service learning, and integrates the state learning standards.

*“Doing good deeds feels good.”*

— Fourth-grade student

In a society with access to advanced technologies, many would think we are now more connected than ever. It is ironic that in reality, many of our children are in fact feeling more disconnected and disengaged. Over the last few years, students and teachers have been in crisis and are overwhelmed. An overreaching accountability system for teachers and an emphasis on test scores has created a great deal of anxiety causing educators

to be reluctant to innovate. In some cases this focus has resulted in teaching isolated skills to prepare for tests.

Despite this climate, there are stories of courageous innovative teachers in every district. Here is how teachers in the Niskayuna Central School District inspired their colleagues and motivated their students by teaching an integrated, service learning unit for an authentic audience; hosting an Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Fair, where friends and family could buy products; and forwarding all profits to help change the world.

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*Carol Herrington is a veteran teacher with 26 years of experience, 21 of them at grade 4. She is a graduate of the Niskayuna School system, teaching at the same elementary school she attended as a child. A member of the Niskayuna TA and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Herrington frequently brings new ideas and strategies to her colleagues.*

*Chris Lasher is in his ninth year of teaching fourth grade. A member of the Niskayuna TA and a district leader, Lasher adapted the NYS math modules to include guided notes, which he shared with his colleagues. Additionally, he has created integrated curriculum to bridge Niskayuna Standards with the new Common Core.*

**Annette Romano, Niskayuna Teachers Association**  
**Carol Herrington, Niskayuna Teachers Association**  
**Chris Lasher, Niskayuna Teachers Association**

### **Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Fair**

It was early June, I had so much to do as I was finishing up the school year, but I was curious to see the culmination of a new district unit: the first annual Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Fair for all of Niskayuna's fourth graders. As I was walking with streams of children and parents to the high school, I noticed a preschooler clutching two dollars in his hand. He and his grandmother were walking quickly and as I spoke to them I realized I knew this grandmother. I taught her daughter in first grade many years ago. Niskayuna is a suburban community, near Schenectady, New York. It's a place where families stay. The families and educators' commitment and support for education is critical to the district's success.

Within the high school gymnasium, more than 400 fourth graders and teachers had set up their business booths. Prior to this event, students designed marketing materials, budgeted their expenses and set a cost for their products in order to determine their profit margin. Throughout this well-planned unit, these students needed to collaborate as a team and work together.

As I walked around and asked what the students liked most about this project, the majority said it was because they were selling their products for a good cause. "It makes me feel good to make money to help children." "Even though we are only children, we still can do something big." These students were raising money to donate to charity.

So what did the kids and teachers learn doing this project? I heard one student say, "I have learned partner work can be confusing, but when you work hard and work together, you can strengthen friendships." In one year, their project scaled from just one school to the whole district (all five elementary schools) changing the world for a common cause!

This came about because during the 2015–16 school year, the Niskayuna Central School District had a renewed commitment, investment, and focus on curriculum by providing nine release days for teacher leaders to develop Understanding by Design units in English language arts and mathematics. The Entrepreneur and Humanitarian unit became a focus of the fourth-grade curriculum design team through intensive collaboration with colleagues.

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Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

Teachers began with many instructional materials focused on social studies, but the goal was to integrate reading, writing, social studies, and math for a completely comprehensive unit.

Fourth-grade teachers from **all** five elementary schools throughout the district met during the year to design integrated units that stayed true to Niskayuna values while addressing New York State Learning Standards. Fourth-grade teachers Carol Herrington and Chris Lasher brought a unit they wanted to enhance to three intensive days of collaboration with their grade level colleagues representing the other elementary schools.

I was fortunate to support this work in my new teacher leader role, in which I guided teachers through the Understanding by Design framework (Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, 2011) while also embedding the state's learning standards. This article presents the power of collaboration and empowering teachers to develop their district units by using a “backward design” process, which starts with where they wanted students to be at the end of the unit.

Follow their journey through this unit's creation.

## This Is What You Do With An Idea Unit Overview and Rationale:

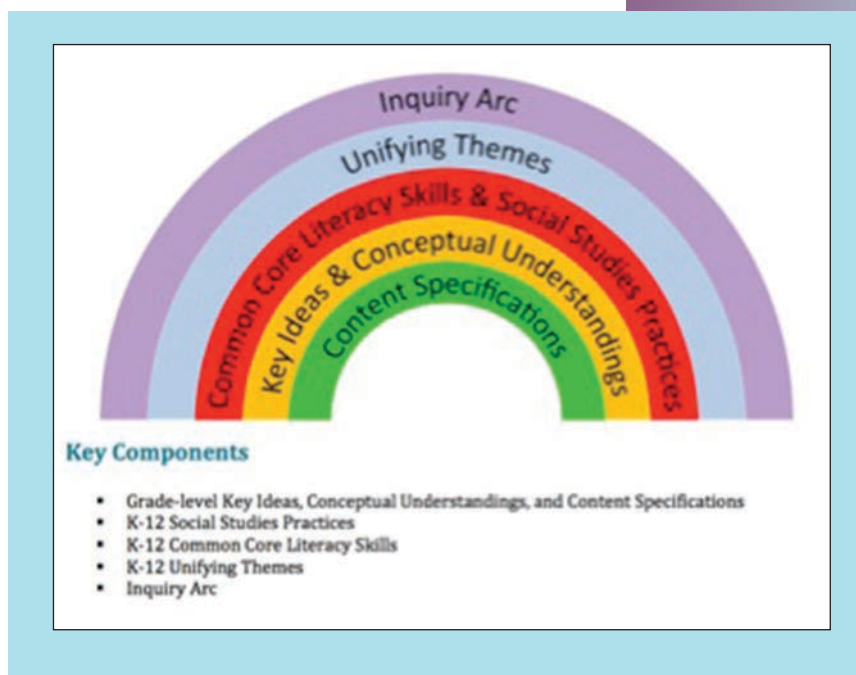
The question is asked and answered in Kobi Yamada's book, *What Do You Do with an Idea?* Our answer: You change the world. This book was selected as the hook to get students thinking. It is the story of an idea and a child who shares it with the world. Throughout the story as the child's confidence grows so does the idea and then one day something amazing happens.

While developing the Entrepreneur and Humanitarian unit, teachers realized the new state learning standards aim to prepare students for “college and career readiness.” As educators, we believe in teaching the whole child through service learning opportunities; fostering academic, social and emotional growth. Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Learn and Serve America National Service Learning Clearinghouse). This project took the standards one step further by preparing our students for college, career, and **citizenship** readiness. We guide students to reflect on their role in society. The children question what can they do in order to make the world a better place? What strengths do they bring to the task?

This unit incorporated positive psychology. The traditional character education program prescribes what students “should” do to be good or improve themselves, i.e. responsibility, kindness, respect, etc. However, current research shows that applying personal character strengths that children already have has a tremendous positive impact on a child’s quality of life. Therefore, they are building upon their individual strengths, rather than trying to take on a few prescribed traits. In a resume, the children identify the character strengths that make them unique, and use those strengths to form balanced business partnerships.

“The C3 Framework (The College, Career and Civic Life), is centered on an Inquiry Arc — a set of interlocking and mutually supportive ideas that frame the ways students learn social studies content. By focusing on inquiry, the framework emphasizes the disciplinary concepts and practices that support students as they develop the capacity to know, analyze, explain, and argue about interdisciplinary challenges in our social world (NCSS, p.6, 2013).”

The purpose of the unit is to find a charity to support in both a monetary and active way. The children are focused on finding a way to help change the world. Children in all five schools are given a list of several



choices and vote on their favorite one. The data is compiled and the top vote getter is chosen. Next children create businesses and market products to sell, raising money to donate to charity.

In order to connect with our community, teachers invited the founders of Jack’s Place into each of the schools to tell their story. The organization was formed after the tragic death of Jack Falvo III. At his memorial service, Jack’s mother heard stories of how he connected with children and helped others in need; stories that she had not known about before his passing. The goal of Jack’s Place is to provide a “home” for the families of out of town patients of our area hospitals and long term care facilities while their loved ones are rehabilitating.

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Planning with the end in mind results in more explicit goals, authentic performance tasks, and more effective teaching.

Jack's mother explained to the fourth graders that in order to move forward she had to create something positive out of her devastation. She shared that she is getting through life without her son by giving back.

The children were silent as they listened and connected to the emotions in the room. Hearing her story catapulted the students into action.

As students collaborated with their self-selected team members, they came to consensus around a business idea/product, and created a business name, slogan and emblem. They then conducted a market survey to determine the feasibility of their product. The data gathered from the survey was graphed and analyzed for patterns. Following plan approval, students determined an appropriate cost for their product and made a plan for production. Advertising techniques and strategies were taught and utilized to promote products. Each business created TV commercials (iMovies) in collaboration with the school's media specialist in the library, radio commercials (morning announcements), fliers in art class to hang in the hallway, business cards, etc. They did anything possible to get the word out.

Teachers modeled persuasive writing techniques and students wrote letters to consumers to persuade them to buy their product.

The unit also focused on economics and how businesses are established and run. The children built resumes, received letters of recommendations, and matched individual student skills with long-term goals/products as they thought about how they might use their talents later in life. These real-world experiences have created pint-sized entrepreneurs and civic-minded youth, some of whom now run their own websites and continue to give back to charities of their choice.

### **The Curriculum Design Process: Understanding by Design (UbD)**

With the end in mind, the team began to craft the unit utilizing the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2011). This is a three-stage backward design process for curriculum planning, which starts with what they wanted the students to know and be able to do by the end of the unit. Planning with the end in mind results in more explicit goals, authentic performance tasks, and more effective teaching. It's like knowing where you are going when you take a road trip.

The culminating activity of the unit became the Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Fair with the entire district's fourth-grade students shouting out, "We can change the world!"

Students very easily could have independently set up a traditional lemonade stand to earn a few bucks to pass on to charity; however, there was so much more collaborative, authentic and interdisciplinary learning throughout this unit.

*“It’s an honor to be an entrepreneur, especially when you can help change the world!”*

— Fourth-grade student

### **UbD Stage 1 – Identify Desired Results:**

In Stage 1, we reviewed standards and established goals. *“What should students know, understand, and be able to do? What content is worthy of understanding? What ‘enduring’ understandings are designed? What essential questions will be explored?”* (2006, Tomlinson & McTighe, p. 27).”

To prepare for the unit design process, teachers used a professional learning day. The stacks and bags of instructional materials educators began with focused on social studies and writing. Since the New York State Social Studies framework was released in January of 2015, they realized that our district curriculum didn’t address the social studies practices of Economics and Economics Systems and Civic Participation. They also saw this as an opportunity to revamp this

unit in a more authentic way and to prepare students for the real world through service learning. It was also a district goal to embed reading and math standards and explicitly teach the skills in a meaningful way. Out of these issues the team developed their Entrepreneur and Humanitarian unit.

During Stage 1, the district’s fourth-grade team began to think about the Enduring Understandings *“What do you want students to remember about this learning experience that will stick with them throughout their lives?”* We wanted our students to be proficient in the economics and civic participation strands of the New York State Social Studies Framework. The predominant economic enduring understanding in our unit is to explain why and how individuals and businesses specialize in trade. The predominant civic participation enduring understanding is to internalize the responsibility as a citizen of a community by identifying situations in which social actions are required; and participating to help solve a problem.

Then the educators began to develop thematic “essential” questions to guide students’ thinking and establish the inquiry: *“How do you use your strengths to change the world?”* Additional essential questions were designed to foster inquiry around persuasive writing and geometry.

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*“It’s an honor to be an entrepreneur, especially when you can help change the world!”*

— Fourth-grade student

“It takes effort  
and complete  
confidence  
to succeed.”

— Fourth-grade student

Next, the team thoughtfully selected the appropriate student learning standards in English language arts, mathematics, and social studies to identify the concepts and skills (what students should know and be able to do).

NYS ELA standards and Literacy in History/Social Studies, and Technical Subjects under the Anchor Standards for Listening and Speaking:

- Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:
- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understandings of presentations.
- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

*“It takes effort and complete confidence to succeed.”* — Fourth-grade student

## Stage 2 – Determine Assessment Evidence:

*“How will we know whether students have achieved the desired results? What will we accept as evidence of student understanding and proficiency?”*  
(Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p.28).”

Before designing their lessons, teachers thought like assessors about how to collect data on student understanding. The evidence needs to align with the desired results in Stage 1. Therefore, when creating our assessment evidence, we considered the meanings of the word understanding. For our students to truly understand the concepts taught in the unit, we turned to Wiggins & McTighe’s *Six Facets of Understanding* (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006) which serve as indicators of how understanding is demonstrated by our students.

Tomlinson and McTighe propose that when students truly understand they can explain, interpret, apply, have perspective, display empathy, and have self-knowledge — all of which are embedded in the authentic context of their Entrepreneur and Humanitarian unit. Further, the teachers utilized Tomlinson and McTighe’s **GRASPS** acronym to create an authentic unit. The unit includes a real-world **goal**, and meaningful **role** for the student, an authentic **audience**, a contextualized **situation** that involves real-world application, student-generated culminating

**products**, and consensus-driving performance **standards** (criteria) for judging success (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

The team referred to the Rigor and Relevance Framework with the UbD lesson template to think about how students create and transfer learning across the content areas. This is the point where we hooked the students and made the learning memorable.

The performance task for this unit was designed to include all the elements required in the Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Fair booth, such as a tri-fold poster board, products on display, a graph of their market survey, letters of recommendation, and persuasive letters to potential consumers. The criteria were described in a rubric that was aligned to the NYS ELA standards and Literacy in History/Social Studies, and Technical Subjects [See appendix]. The criteria we selected were under the Anchor Standards for Listening and Speaking: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:

- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Make strategic use of digital media

and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understandings of presentations.

- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

*“Trying hard is the main ingredient to success.”* — Fourth-grade student

### **Stage 3 – Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction:**

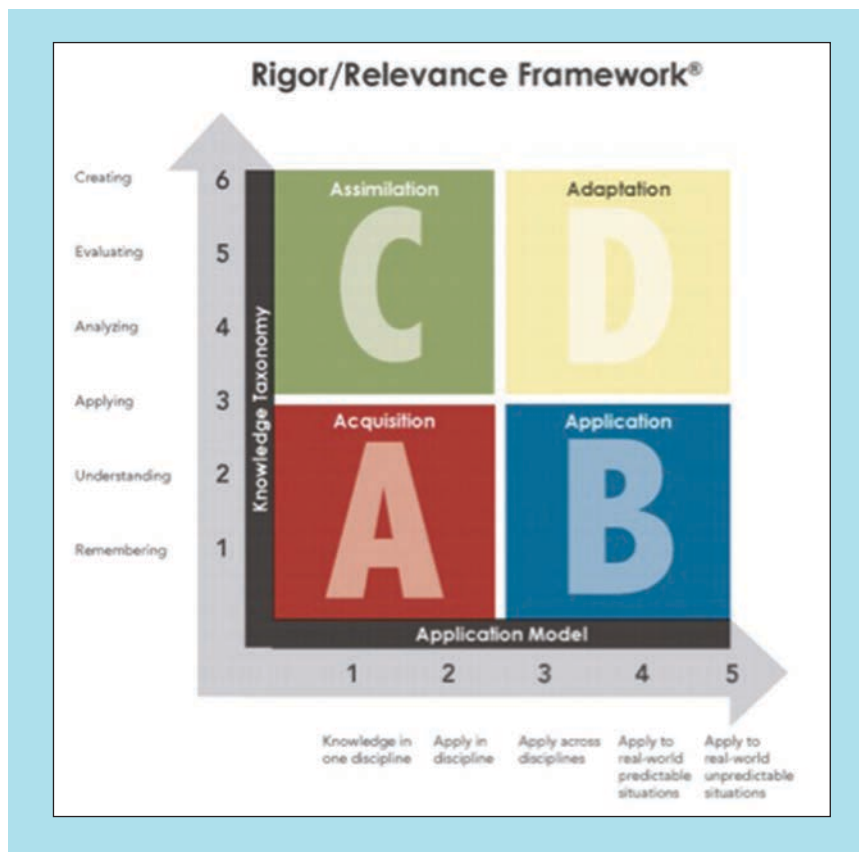
*“What enabling knowledge and skills will students need to perform effectively and achieve desired results? What activities, sequence, and resources are best suited to accomplish our goals?”* (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p.28).”

The ability to transfer understanding is the long-term aim of all that we do with students. In order for transfer to be possible, teachers wanted students to “uncover” understandings rather than have their teacher’s “cover” them. Our students needed to own their learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p.15). Therefore, we utilized the A-M-T acronym for *acquisition, meaning, and transfer*. Our students acquired facts and skills through some direct instruction. (See Table of Learning Activities in the appendix.) To develop meaning, students made inferences, tested

The ability to transfer understanding is the ... aim of all that we do with students.

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theories, and looked for connections. Lastly, having accrued the knowledge and skills and gaining meaningful understandings, students applied and adapted their learning to new situations (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

In Stage 3, teachers determine how to arrive at desired results and evidence of learning. It is here that we used Tomlinson and McTighe's six facets to engage students in higher-order thinking along with the International Center for Leadership in Education's Rigor and Relevance Framework (2016) to generate and scaffold the learning activities.

Using Tomlinson and McTighe's **WHERE TO** framework, we guided students toward Quadrant D: Adaptation, in the Rigor and Relevance Framework (see appendix).

**W = where, why, what:** reminds teachers to communicate goals clearly and help students see relevance.

**H = hook:** how will students be engaged learners?

**E = equip, experiences:** what learning experiences will equip students so they are able to master the identified learning standards.

**R = rethink, revision:** encourage students to rethink and revise previous learning.

**E = evaluation:** promoting student self-evaluation. This is where we wanted to promote reflective learners in our classrooms.

**T = tailor:** all learning activities needed to be tailored to differentiation.

**O = organized:** this is the sequence of learning activities for best results.

The Entrepreneur Project is an opportunity for students of all abilities to be successful and to realize that there is a purpose to learning. The most profitable businesses are not necessarily those run by "straight-A" students. So as all the fourth-grade students, families and community members came together everyone could feel the positive energy in the gymnasium. This

is a place to see students motivated by purpose, autonomy and mastery, and where a love of learning is being fostered.

During Stage 3, we spent time scaffolding our learning activities. The Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Unit had a strong emphasis on social studies skills and content knowledge. However, through collaboration, teachers were able to also embed the ELA and math standards for the grade level and explicitly teach the skills needed for their students.

Because entrepreneurial profits were contributed to the local community, this unit taught students empathy and generosity. This is a project that no fourth grader will forget and has the potential to make a lasting impact. One fourth-grader reflected, “It’s an honor to be an entrepreneur, especially when you can help change the world!”

*“It is fun knowing that all of our hard work is going to a good cause.”*

— Fourth-grade student

## Conclusion:

Supported by district leadership, resources and collaboration, classroom teachers Chris Lasher and Carol Herrington were able to transform a successful unit from their classrooms at one elementary school into a district-wide, integrated fourth-grade project where students raised \$9,000 for a local charity. Yet the work is not done. This idea “wants food,” “a lot of attention,” and continues to “grow and grow.” Students say they “feel more alive, like they could do anything” because of this project.

Throughout the 2016–17 school year, the school district has allotted two additional release days to continue this work. Creating an added focus on poetry, reading comprehension, and graphing, along with outreach to partner schools will all be considered.

As with any good idea, something amazing happened. “It changed right before their eyes spreading its wings, taking flight, and bursting into the world.”

That’s what you do with an idea, “You change the world.”

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## RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY THE AUTHORS

- [http://www.niskayunaschools.org/news/2014-15/060815\\_Hillside\\_entrepreneurial\\_fair.cfm](http://www.niskayunaschools.org/news/2014-15/060815_Hillside_entrepreneurial_fair.cfm)
- <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework>
- <http://www.leadered.com/pdf/Rigor%20Relevance%20Framework%20White%20Paper%202016.pdf>
- <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/Character>

## Appendix 1: Learning Activities

### **Day 1:**

Unit Kickoff:

1. Read Aloud “What do you do with an Idea?” by Kobi Yamada.
2. Read and discuss what it means to be an entrepreneur.
3. Watch Thomas Edison video (see resources below)
4. Discuss economics and economic vocabulary that will be used within the unit.
5. Create background knowledge by reading and discussing business idea and partners worksheet.

### **Day 2:**

Standard: Students will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization is appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### **Complete Business Proposal (Form 1)**

- Identify what you are good at
- Identify your product idea
- Identify your targeted market
- List the resources needed

Standard: Students will present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### **Create a resume (Form 2)**

- Identify experience and skills which make you a good business partner
- Make groups

### **Day 3:**

#### **Create a business name/slogan/emblem (Form 3)**

**(Note: Form 4 is in assessments)**

- Make a slogan
- Make an emblem
- Focus on portraying product and enticing buyers
- Emblem/logo should be noticeable yet simple
- Make a prototype (after Form 4)
- E-mail teachers to see when students can come to show off product to classes
- Use Activity sheet 9 to help familiarize students with symbols

#### **Day 4:**

Students will adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated and appropriate.

##### **Decide on profitable product**

- Present product idea to whole class
- Vote on six to seven classroom products
- Create business groups
- Create prototypes to use during market survey

##### **Market Survey/Research/Letter of Recommendation**

- Survey people to determine demand for product (Form 5)
- Market Survey Presentation Script
- Make a good impression on your audience, be prepared, have a prototype, share your letter of recommendation (Form 6)
- Find out size of market
- Find out percent of total market interested in your product
- Identify barriers of profitability such as high capital costs, high time per product
- Evaluate results — profitable? High consumer demand? Parental support?

#### **Day 5:**

Students will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization is appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

##### **Business Plan**

- Summarize what you are trying to do.
- Create a business description and clearly define your idea.
- Define goals
- Justify why this type of business was selected: sole proprietorship vs group
- Create management team, provide background
- Explain how to ensure a successful product, organize business, make decisions about pricing and create advertising
- Identify raw materials
- Describe the market opportunity
- Describe competitors and prove no direct competition
- Describe marketing/advertising strategy — write commercial script, choose brief part for morning announcement “radio” commercial.

## **Investment**

- Use Executive Summary sheet to clearly communicate your concept (Form 7)
- Prepare for questions investor might ask — raising the money is the most difficult part of starting your own business
- Persuade potential investors to loan you money to start up your business (Form 8)
- State clearly amount of money needed, precisely how you are going to use it, how the money will make business profitable

## **Day 6:**

Students will conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

## **Market Survey Summary**

- Plan, study and analyze the data in the market survey and look at ideas critically
- Pitch ideas to potential investors and consumers
- Complete break-even analysis (Form 9) to ensure profit

## **Day 7–13:**

Students will write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting an idea or point of view with reasons and information.

## **Persuasive Letter Form 10**

- Identify audience
- Point of view
- Three reasons to convince
- Test quality of reasons
- Focus on leads — either summarize point of view or use a thought-provoking question
- Focus on closing, urge audience to change mind, end with a statement that links back to the issue, point of view or urges a call to action
- Use transition words to move writing along
- Revise/Edit writing using checklists given
- Example unit to review
- Persuasive Letter outline

### **Day 7:**

Explain the following elements of persuasive text:

- The audience is the person or people you are trying to convince.
- The issue is the topic you are writing about.
- The evidence is the reasons you are using to frame your argument.

Read aloud sample letter *Choosing My Own Bedtime*

Record the audience, issue, and evidence on the *Mentor Text Elements of Persuasive Texts Organizer*

Business groups choose from the mentor texts to complete at least two other rows on the *Mentor Text Elements of Persuasive Texts Organizer*.

Review with whole class, and discuss answers.

### **Day 8:**

Hand out graphic organizer, p.12 in Calkins unit. Have students write their own. Assign audience and issue. The audience: all possible consumers (students, parents, teachers, etc.). The issue: convince consumers to buy your product. Add these to the *Persuasive Letter organizer*.

Discuss *Testing the Quality of Reasons* page, p. 19 in Calkins unit.

On the reverse side evaluate the quality of your reasons. If you think it's a good reason add it to the "good" side. If it is a weaker reason add it to the "bad" side. Then, rewrite, eliminate, or create a new reason. You might want four to five good reasons when you are done.

Out of the good reasons, pick your top three, then put the top three in order of importance. Have a conversation about the reason for this. You want to begin with your second best reason, have your middle reason the weakest, and close with your strongest reason.

Make a class list of persuasive words. Examples: important, best, effective, strong reason, deserve, ready, perfect solution, If..., then...

### **Day 9–11:**

*Introduction:* Review what students know about introduction paragraphs, apply to an opening sentence of the persuasive letter. An opening sentence must state the issue and point of view directly or ask a thought-provoking question followed by a sentence that states the issue and your point of view. Use transition words to begin each sentence that lays out your argument in the introduction. Review p. 23 with students.

*Body:* Review the letter. Show how the good reasons were used in paragraphs in the letter. Use the topic sentences from your numbered three good reasons. Students should take their good reasons and use the chart of transition words (p.23), to support them with evidence in body paragraphs.

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*Conclusion:* At the end of the letter you need a final plea. This should summarize your reasons, and serve as a final push to convince the reader. It does not provide new information. Review the final plea in the example letter. Also, discuss the *Final Plea Examples*.

Using p. 31 as a guide, start writing. Depending on time, continue the next day.

## **Day 12:**

Refer to the *Persuasive Letter Revision/Editing Checklist*. Reread your writing carefully and check off as you complete each item. Once complete, choose one member of your business to do a second edit and discuss findings with you.

## **Day 13:**

Write your final copy at home.

## **Day 14–23:**

Students will make strategic use of digital media and digital displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentation.

*PowerPoint advertising techniques*

### **Complete Advertising Form 11 in class as a business**

- Commercial — Do this during library time with librarian leading the teaching
- Flier — Do this during computer time
- Advertisement — Do this during art time with the art teacher leading the teaching
- Radio commercial (AM Announcements)
- Invitations — Do this during computer time
- Summary of graphing based on actual market survey results
- During computer time students will write a summary based on the actual results of the graphing activity using data from market survey results

### **Production**

- Identify method of production
- Location of work fill out Form 13
- Use about a week in class and then continue to produce at home

**Day 24–25:**

**Selling**

- Set up preview day in school
- Fair held at Niskayuna High School in evening
- Summarize profit using Form 14

**Day 26:**

- Humanitarian effort
- Collect money made during fair
- Reimburse any loans
- Calculate the total amount made
- Make preparations to celebrate and donate monies to charity of choice