OPINION WRITING: 1960s

In order to build background knowledge, a few days can be spent on the following activities (any reasonable order is appropriate):

1. The classroom bulletin board may be decorated with flag and SSB, including demonstration and protest related items and posters including some important vocabulary words: patriotism, Battle of 1812, Fort McHenry, Star Spangled Banner, Vietnam War, protest, Woody Guthrie, etc. Add words as they come up during the lesson and refer to the bulletin board frequently during teaching.

1. Learn or review briefly some important occurrences of the 1960s including the speeches of Martin Luther King, space travel, civil rights activities, the Vietnam War.
2. Discuss “patriotism” and learn more about it.
3. Choose one or two appropriate children’s books related to the 60s, like Martin’s Big Words, or The Wall in order to review and inspire feelings during the writing process.
4. Read together “This Land is Your Land” song lyrics.
5. Work in pairs or similar to discuss each stanza. Assign stanza to groups. Have them read the stanza aloud, copy the stanza, list any words they do not understand and answer questions together about the stanza. Groups should draw a picture that demonstrates the main ideas on poster paper. Groups may thoughtfully present poster to entire class.
6. Play the song “When the World is On Fire” so that students see that Guthrie was setting the words to a tune he already know.
7. Listen to the song being delivered by Woodie Guthrie. This can be done a few times during the weeks of work.
8. Chant the song with teacher’s assistance to help memorize the words. Perhaps chant while actively dancing or while standing in a circle alternately saying the words. This procedure can be practiced daily or as often as appropriate.
9. Sing the song together at appropriate times, using written words as necessary, standing and with hand over heart if desired.
10. A few days into the lesson and after singing, have students write on a 5 x 7 card one thing about the song that made them have a feeling of patriotism. Collect cards.
11. The following day, list those patriotic feelings on the board and discuss.
12. Teacher demonstrates (with student assistance) choosing the three most important reasons why or ways in which we felt patriotic and prewrite details about these feeling. Teacher might demonstrate drawing a picture for and writing a description of one opinion. Allow students to choose more and write their own individual opinions.
13. Continue to read and review the children’s books, review the lyrics, chant, dance, sing often during the writing process in order to allow students to re-evaluate and re-determine their opinion positions.
14. Students draw pictures of their three most important reasons for feeling patriotic. Then they share reasons with a partner.
15. Continue to sing, discuss, refer to bulletin board, read parts of stories before each day’s writing so that students will have renewed vigor and ideas to contribute.
16. Students begin writing their rough drafts including paragraphs, introduction, main body, and conclusion.
17. Teacher reviews each student’s work one on one as students complete rough draft. Teacher asks questions like, does this introduction really and in an orderly manner tell the reader what to expect in our essay?, could the structure of this sentence be improved?, can we add details here to help the reader understand our feelings better?, could we add an adjective here to improve the detail in our writing?, are the paragraphs appropriately placed and is each one on topic?, does each paragraph have a clearly written topic sentence?, are there any spelling, punctuation, capitalization errors?, does the conclusion concisely restate or draw conclusions about the opinions stated?. Teacher assists in making lots of corrections so that students clearly see that even the teacher’s work needs lots of editing.
18. After formal writing is complete, students may work in small groups to create their own patriotic song to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner. They may complete two or three verses. They may write and illustrate their lyrics for publication and they may practice and perform the work during class.
19. Throughout the school year, students may continue to sing, chant, do simple dance movements with this song and others that we learn.