“Short Assignments” Sort of Mini Lesson

For the majority of my ninth grades students, writing is tedious and formulaic. My year-end goal is that my kids understand that writing is intentional, flexible – that it can yield different results depending on the choices a writer makes and that it is worth doing well. This lesson will also review formal sentence structure, run ons and fragments and lay the groundwork for reading and analyzing the author’s choice in “My Name” by Sandra Cisneros. This lesson will take 2 ½ - 3 forty minute periods.

My initial central text is “Short Assignments” although the central text will move as the unit does. This reading will be done at the beginning of the year establishing the “one inch picture frame” encouragement that Lamott creates and that I will use liberally throughout the year.

**Day One**
Before doing the Think Aloud of “Short Assignments” with the class, I would like them to take a crack at its form. As English teachers, complete with the red pens I’ll hand out, the kids will find and mark every “incorrect” sentence that they can in the section of text that they’ll be given. They’ll mark them as an instructor might. After they have worked individually marking the text for errors, they will collaborate with a person responsible for marking the same text. They’ll share the errors they found on their paper and add any errors from their partner’s that they may not have noticed and vice versa. I’ll move around the room and listen to what they’ve found. This will give me a good idea about their grasp on straightforward grammar concepts and “grammarly” vocabulary.

After the errors are identified, they’ll correct those errors with their partner, again using their best English teacher manner. As they complete their corrections, they’ll type them into a Word Documents at my desk. Their homework assignment is a journal response *Is Anne Lamott a good writer? What makes you say so?*

**Day Two**
After a quick journal check and reminder of yesterday’s lesson, they’ll meet with their partner and share their journal responses and then share out with the rest of the class beginning the first of “what makes writing good?” discussions we’ll have throughout the year. Each pair will share their answer and their reasoning. Once students have shared, we’ll read the corrected “Short Assignments” from the Word document on the board. After they’ve read it, they’ll meet with their partner and talk about which version is better and why and then share out with the class. After hearing the other students’ shares, they’ll revisit their journal to amend or expand what they wrote about Lamott being a good writer or not.

**Day Three**
Lastly, we’ll do a Think Aloud with focus on the effects of the sentence structures, run-ons and fragments Lamott used and the effects that these choices make on the piece. Because of the work, they did during the first two days, the Think Aloud, their understanding of the piece will be smoother and they can begin not only noticing the writer’s choices but also be able to articulate the effect of that move. After the Think
Aloud, they’ll revisit the question about Lamott as a writer in their journal. The Assessment will follow this step.

**Assessment:** They’ll respond to Truman Capote’s quote *Writing has laws of perspective, of shade just as painting does, or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself* first in their journals and then selecting their one best line, put it on a Post It Note. This combined with their error identification, correction, journal writes and class discussions will give me multiple formative assessments for this lesson.