Infographic-Making Activity
By Michael MacBride

Objective:
To encourage the use of charts, graphs, maps, and other infographics in student writing.

Approximate Time Required: 30 minutes

Materials Needed:
- A computer with access to the internet and access to the video "Kurt Vonnegut on the shapes of stories" available a number of online locations, including: https://vimeo.com/53286941 or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-84vuR1f90
- It also helps if the class has access to a computer lab, or their own laptops, but this can be done as a handwritten activity also.

Rationale:
Just as photographs can convey complex ideas efficiently, so too can graphs, charts, maps, and other infographics. Students tend towards citing statistics and cluttering their writing with attempts to regurgitate difficult source material. Though summary and paraphrase should certainly be encouraged, having students create a graph, chart, map, or other infographic is a creative way to encourage them to employ the skills of summary and paraphrase without their realizing that's what they're doing. In order to create a unique infographic, students need to have conducted research and have the ability to understand what they've read and find a pattern (or sense of organization) in the material. Not only are these infographics insightful and useful to liven up student projects, but they are also deceptively complex to create (but very rewarding when completed).

What to do before class:
If you're conducting the activity in a computer lab, then familiarize yourself with infographic-making software that you can recommend to students. Excel, Numbers, Google Docs, and similar spreadsheet programs work well, but there are also plenty of free webpages that offer unique features.

If you are completing this activity outside of a computer lab, then it helps to bring examples of infographics to give students ideas for creating their own. Additionally, be sure to have plenty of paper available, markers, and any other tools that you think will be helpful.

What to do during class:
Show Kurt Vonnegut's video about charting stories. It's funny, but it also provides an example of a creative chart/graph that might not immediately come to mind for students. Ask students how Vonnegut's chart was effective? What ways could we improve his chart? What effect does it have when we combine a "creative" art with a "scientific" form (such as a chart/graph)?

The hope is to inspire students to think more creatively about the options available to them. Charts and graphs don't need to merely contain statistics and figures, and they don't need to only accompany reports. Infographics can concisely and efficiently convey complex information to

the reader, and often become a showpiece of a student project. It's also important to remind students that the information within the infographic needs to be properly cited, and they should complete a References page to accompany their work.

What to do after the activity:
Have students share their infographics with one another. Not only does this sharing provide the opportunity to "show off," but it also helps to ensure that the infographic is understandable and conveys the information the author intended. An additional benefit is that students will see the diversity of approaches and techniques that can be used.

Suggested Resources:
The following is a list of some free applications to create infographics (it is by no means exhaustive:
- Canva: https://www.canva.com/
- Charts—Google Developers: https://developers.google.com/chart/
- Dipity: http://www.dipity.com/
- Easelly: http://www.easel.ly/
- Infogram: https://infogr.am/
- Photo Infographic Gen Lite: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=mariusSoft.InFotoFree&hl=en
- Piktochart: http://piktochart.com/
- Venngage: https://venngage.com/
- Visme: http://www.visme.co/
- Visually: http://visual.ly/

Additionally, there are a number of good books that discuss how to use and how to create infographics. The McClure and Toth (2015) article, especially, is thoughtfully constructed and provides important questions to ask about authority and credibility with regard to charts, graphs, and infographics in general. The Lankow and Crooks (2012) book provides a solid foundation for understanding infographics. The Doyle (2013) book is not a "how to" book by any means, but rather a collection of insightful and creative infographics. Finally, Smith's (2014) text is a children's book, but it takes very complicated (particularly large and hard to visualize topics) and resizes them in imaginative ways that might inspire students.

Doyle, P. (2013). *World War II in numbers: an infographic guide to the conflict, its conduct, and its casualties*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books Ltd.

Lankow, J., Ritchie, J., & Crooks, R. (2012). *Infographics: the power of visual storytelling*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

McClure, H. and Toth, C. (2015). Louder than words: using infographics to teach the value of information and authority. In P. Bravender, H. A. McClure, & G. Schaub (Eds), *Teaching information literacy threshold concepts: lesson plans for librarians* (pp. 166-172). Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Smith, D. J. (2014). *If… A mind-bending way of looking at big ideas and numbers*. Tonawnda, NY: Kids Can Press Ltd.