Diann Jordan

Alabama State University

What units do you use in your course?

Cancer, Sickle Cell Disease, Energy Drinks, Extinction Crisis, Fitness Trackers and Influenza A

What is your favorite feature of Why Biology?

I love the integration of material for all themes. I like that the thematic approach means you don't have to necessarily lecture every day. I can easily incorporate an engaging activity while covering any of the themes.

How would you explain Why Biology? to a colleague?

Why Biology? is a more engaging way to teach any student but I find it very useful for non-majors biology. It is a diverse and integrated approach to the same material that you are trying to teach using a traditional lecture. To me, it embodies the goal of less lecture and more discussion and it provides online activities related to the themes for students.

What are your top 3 tips for using Why Biology?

1. Get training.
2. Learn from more experienced users.
3. Use what works for your students.

How do students benefit from learning with themes?

My students benefitted greatly from the thematic approach and told me that they loved the discussion approach more than a traditional lecture. Students' grades improved dramatically this past spring with a 97% pass rate (70% A) when I completely embraced the Why Biology? thematic approach to teaching. I will not go back to traditional lecture.

Terina Nusinov

Seminole State College

What units do you use in your course?

Influenza A, Energy Drinks, Sickle Cell Disease, Cancer, and Climate Change

What is your favorite feature of Why Biology?

There are so many - the relevancy is by far the best thing! The instructor resources are awesome, plus I love the adaptive pre-work - my students come to class knowing things!

How would you explain Why Biology? to a colleague?

Why Biology? is a relevancy approach that chooses topics that matter to non-majors biology students. The units are set up so that they can be presented in any order as any pertinent science is applied to the central theme in each unit.

What are your top 3 tips for using Why Biology?

1. Assign the pre-work.
2. Make use of the instructor resources.
3. Leave time for questions and discussion.

How do students benefit from learning with themes?

The students are much more engaged in class - I get so many more questions about clarifying the material, and questions about topics they are curious about.

Wes Rogers

Georgia Gwinnett College

What units do you use in your course?

Influenza A, Energy Drinks, Sickle Cell Disease, Cancer, GMOs, Fitness Trackers, and Climate Change

What is your favorite feature of Why Biology?

The ease of use and how the adaptive learning helps students understand instead of memorize.

How would you explain Why Biology? to a colleague?

It is a digital series of themes, divided into easily handled modules, with tons of activities and exercises for instructors to use.

What are your top 3 tips for using Why Biology?

1. Don't start full speed. Take it easy on yourself the first time you use it, get used to the setup and process, get comfortable with the topics.
2. Don't limit your class time to only the themes. Answer any questions that arise and get the students engaged.
3. Don't be afraid to ask your McGraw Hill team for help.

How do students benefit from learning with themes?

They get exposed to topics they might see on the news or have personally experienced. They get to see that science isn't that scary.

Learn more about Why Biology? bit.ly/3ChsSvN »

Melissa Gutierrez

The University of Southern Mississippi

What units do you use in your course?

Influenza A, Energy Drinks, Sickle Cell Disease, Cancer, GMOs, Fitness Trackers, Extinction Crisis, and Climate Change

What is your favorite feature of Why Biology?

The writing of the text and the consistency of the theme embedded in each module (intertwining the theme with different biology concepts). It's easy to read for students. Also, the availability of the various Connect assignments, activities and reports.

How would you explain Why Biology? to a colleague?

Rather than starting with biology content and fitting it into relevant topics like other non-major textbooks on the market, Why Biology? starts with the relevant themes and threads in the biological concepts. I read once that Why Biology? is designed so the instructor is not the only source of instruction. I agree. Why Biology? along with the different assessments in Connect allows an instructor to customize meaningful lectures or lessons with a wide range of assessment tools. Why Biology? gives students a sense of ownership of their learning and that is one of the strongest elements in student success and learning.

How do students benefit from learning with themes?

Prior to using Why Biology?, the course covered complex biological concepts in a level of detail that was not necessary for non-majors biology course.

The theme-based approach allowed students to gain scientific literacy skills because they are continually connecting biology concepts with relevant topics without feeling overwhelmed and defeated. It makes science/biology appealing to a wider audience and increases student success.

What are your top 3 tips for using Why Biology?

1. Make sure to include discussion in your relevancy course. Your students have wonderful ideas and questions about the topics. I know it is easy to get into the routine and focus on the biology, but they are really interested in the connection between the biology and the theme.
2. Explore Connect. Connect provides a platform that is flexible and allows an instructor to use a variety of tools to customize their course for the students.
3. Use the adaptive assignments, but don't overwhelm them with too many concepts at once. I love hearing the students talk about how they remember something because that was covered in the Adaptive Learning Assignment. It really shows that they are putting in the effort to prepare for class and can draw from the materials and apply to the activity we are completing during class time. Bonus tip... use the reports. They provide you with so much valuable information, and they take seconds to run!

Thomas Chen

Santa Monica College

What units do you use in your course?

Influenza A, Energy Drinks, Cancer, Fitness Trackers, Sickle Cell Disease, GMOs, and Climate Change

What is your favorite feature of Why Biology?

Organization of what, why, how and where we are going regarding real-life issues.

How would you explain Why Biology? to a colleague?

Students like this approach and format so they are more engaged and enjoy greater success. Instructors are more invigorated and they feel rewarded and valued by students.

What are your top 3 tips for using Why Biology?

1. Encourage student interaction.
2. Make learning fun by creating a community of learners.
3. Keep your instruction as current as possible.

How do students benefit from learning with themes?

In comparing with classes using “traditional” textbooks, students are more invested in the content and more willing to expand on the topic. In my online discussion board, I have spent less and less time moderating and responding to the online discussion threads. By providing a reasonable rubric, establishing a reward and accountability system based on effort and quality, I am allowed to step away and the discussion board takes on its own life. I think this type of discussion can be implemented in a flipped class format. Once the students have started a structured adaptive learning process and have completed learning modules in each unit, instructors could spend more time in class or in breakout rooms to engage in student discussion.