



**Literacy Through Memoir: An Integrative Approach to Promote
Literacy and High Student Achievement**

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Table of Contents

Part One: Curriculum—Literacy Through Memoir: Guidelines and Materials for the Teacher

• Introduction	3
• Objectives and Goals.....	4
• Implementation.....	6
• Curriculum Content.....	7
• Lesson One—Introductory Lesson: “Tell Me a Story”.....	8
• Lesson Two—“The One Day I Wish I Could Do Over”.....	13
• Lesson Three—“The Day My Life Changed”.....	19
• Lesson Four—“You Mean a Lot to Me!”.....	30
• Lesson Five—“Free Write Day”.....	35
• Lesson Six—“Creative Self”.....	37
• Lesson Seven—“Pictures Tell a Story”.....	43
• Lesson Eight—“All Together Now”.....	46
• Lesson Nine—“Telling MY Story”.....	50
• Lesson Ten—“Sharing My Story”.....	54

Part Two: Academic Paper—

Bridging the Literacy Gap: <i>The Failure of Conventional Education and the Search for Reform</i>	56
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“Through literacy you can begin to see the universe...” --Grace Slick

INTRODUCTION

Ask any teacher what most inspires them to teach, and they will invariably state that the students themselves are the ones who give them that inspiration. As a teacher of nearly twenty years, I can certainly attest to that fact, and share in the knowledge that literacy is the fulcrum that propels students toward a successful career in education.

I began teaching immediately upon graduation, and always loved to help unlock a child’s curiosity. There is a special joy that comes when you see a child’s eyes light up in understanding of a particularly difficult lesson or task. But as the years have passed, I have noticed a strong change in the way education is being done with a change in our focus from being on the child but to the data that standardized testing generates. This has had a direct effect on the engagement of a student’s learning: we no longer are teaching holistically, we are teaching to a test.

One of the obstacles in modern education that plagues the classroom is the lack of innovative ways to evoke a love for reading that is fundamental to a child’s learning. When the media promotes a simple click of the remote to be entertained, it becomes harder to convince a young mind of the benefits of using one’s imagination to hone the thinking process and to strengthen concentration skills, inference and reflection. With standardized testing becoming the new focal point of generating educational progress, we see the steady decline of our student’s performance in the literary areas. Children often find it difficult to discover meaning within a text and comprehension is at an all time low in certain low-performing schools.

Teachers often struggle with the question of how to stimulate the classroom with renewed energy and reinvented strategies to teach literacy to children of the twenty-first century. The challenge is often harder with the middle year’s student, who is known to have specific challenges associated with this age group. In my years in graduate study, my coursework has focused on finding new ways and strategies to reach the middle years student, grades 6-8. Using age-specific text in collaboration with creative memoir is a way I have found to be truly effective in generating engagement in teaching literacy.

This curriculum is an alternative way to teach literacy to students, not just those who are resistant to learning literacy in conventional ways, but to those who wish to experience again the chance to learn holistically. It is my wish that all who attempt to use this program alter it as they see fit, and that it becomes a more fun process in the classroom for the students.

Danielle Porche Payton

OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

The state of North Carolina in 2010 adopted the Common Core State Standards in K-12 Mathematics and K-12 English Language Arts (McCoy). The idea was to promote and encourage consistency in the state's goal to produce prepared students for college and future jobs (McCoy). By embracing the new state standards, the implementation of the New Essential Standards based upon the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy is expected within the classrooms throughout the state of North Carolina (McCoy).

This curriculum focuses on several components within both the *Cognitive Process* and the *Knowledge Dimension*:

Cognitive Process

- Conceptual : Showing knowledge of classifications and categories
- Procedural: Exhibiting subject-specific Skills and subject-specific techniques and methods
- Meta-cognitive: Self-knowledge

Knowledge Dimension

Curriculum will be categorized by the type of knowledge to be learned. The knowledge will fall into one of the three categories within the Cognitive Process above.

Objectives

- The student will recognize the characteristics of the main themes within a story.
- The student will classify the types of literature used within the unit.
- The student will infer the motivations of characters within a story.
- The student will compare the characters and self to create connections and demonstrate understanding of the character within a story.
- The student will implement learned procedures to self-evaluate and assess personal learning.
- The student will analyze the self through an organizational process of memoir creation.
- The student will critique the self and peers in an evaluative process.
- The student will generate writing samples that demonstrate literary prowess and self-reflection.

- The student will produce a memoir that is based upon self-recognition (finding patterns) and recalling past events.
- The student will plan and construct a memoir.

Goals

- Students will complete the reading of a short novel/memoir.
- Students will submit daily entries into a journal.
- Students will practice writing skills.
- Students will learn how to revise a written sample.
- Students will practice peer-evaluation.
- Students will do self-reflection writings through teacher-generated prompts.
- Students will use technology to create presentations and documents.
- Students will create a memoir.

IMPLEMENTATION

Student Selection

Participating students can be part of a classroom setting, or otherwise. It is entirely at the discretion of the facilitator. Although this curriculum is directed to the reluctant reader, it is relatable to students of all levels of literacy. The two novels, *We Beat the Street* by Sharon Draper, Lexile 860, and *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, Lexile 870, can be exchanged to more appropriate novels if necessary. It would be productive to acquire copies of student performance for past standardized tests to gauge progress during the next testing session. If possible, teacher reflection after the implementation of the unit may prove to be productive to make adjustments and changes to make the unit work more suitably for specific classroom use.

Classroom Setting and Resources

A large part of the 21st Century Initiative is to promote and create technologically skilled citizens. Therefore, it is imperative to have access to technology for the students within this unit. The classroom setting should have access to computers with word processing and printing capabilities, and internet access is important for email and research components within the memoir project. All students should have access to desks, adequate lighting and various classroom supplies such as, but not limited to pencils, paper, construction paper, markers, tape, posters, post-its and glue. Data projectors or smart boards for disseminating information are also vital as well as well-trained instructors who understand proper usage of such. Parent involvement is highly encouraged and anticipated due to the closure activity at the end of the unit, and volunteers who aid in the implementation of the curriculum are to be highly valued.

Educators

The educators (teachers) should be well versed in the management of a classroom. The educator should be skillful in understanding and anticipating the needs of a middle school student. Due to the fact that the middle school student is a very social person, the educator needs to be aware and accepting of the fact that the middle school student needs to interact with others to promote learning. It is important that the educator also creates and promotes a positive energy and atmosphere during the learning process. The educator should also maintain open lines of communication with the parents, volunteers and faculty who are helping out to keep the process smooth.

CURRICULUM CONTENT

The curriculum consists of ten ninety-minute lessons to be implemented weekly over a ten week period. It is not recommended that the unit be done in ten consecutive days due to the depth of the process involved. It can be condensed or extended as needed by the educator. Lesson goals, objectives, required resources and preparatory activities are included within each lesson. The Resource Appendix includes necessary worksheets and hand-outs that are to be used with specific lessons. The approximate duration of the lesson is included, and video links are listed for preparatory reasons (these videos can be changed by teacher if desired). Writing prompts, group activities, class discourses and games are also included within the lesson, but can be omitted or recreated according to the educator's wishes.

Lesson 1—“Tell Me a Story”: Introductory Lesson and Preparatory Class

“Tell Me a Story”

Lesson Duration: 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will be introduced to the memoir.
- Students will learn about themselves and explore their identities through sharing.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Grocery paper bags or shoe boxes (amount determined by class number)
- Assorted crayons and markers
- Worksheets: Treasure Box, Worksheet #1, Assignment #1
- Video prepared on data projector, Smart Board, Bright Link, etc.
We Beat the Street by Sharon Draper <http://youtu.be/VwRpeVEcPSE>
The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros http://youtu.be/w_pXXnOMEXQ
- Poster paper/Butcher paper and tape
- Copies of the texts (amount determined by class number)
- Journals/Composition Notebooks (amount determined by class number)
- Pencils

Anticipatory Set

10 Minutes

Before the beginning of the lesson, communicate with students that they are to bring to class a small personal item that is meaningful to them in some way. An example can be a small stuffed animal given by a loved one or a picture of a favorite aunt. The teacher should also bring to class a meaningful object to model the introductory lesson. Be sure to pre-arrange the classroom into a circle or in some way that allows an easy flow of conversation in a non-threatening manner. Place a desk or table in the center of the table. As students file in, ask each student to place their meaningful object in the center table of the circle and then quietly sit down at any available desk. At each desk, have Worksheet #1 and a paper bag for each student to begin on while waiting for the class to begin. The paper bags will hold all the documents created by the students throughout the unit.

Direct Instruction: *15 Minutes*

Teacher begins a discussion by sharing his/her own meaningful thing with the class. Be sure to share about this item in direct relation to the question(s) on the writing prompt to which the students have been exposed. Be sure to encourage and entertain brief questions from the students. Once complete, the teacher will then pick up an item on the center table and ask the owner to share about their meaningful thing. Once that student has finished, they will then chose another item from the table that belongs to another student to continue the sharing. This method of “choosing” will continue until the last item has been shared.

Pass out the composition notebooks to each student. Explain that this shall be their writing journal while working in the unit. Let the students know that the journals are for their own use. Announce that the purpose of the journals and this unit is to give the students a chance to share their own stories by creating a personal memoir. Let the students also know that these journals will be monitored from time to time to confirm that they are writing, but will be private to the owner. Have a brief conversation with the class about privacy, and what it will mean in regards to their writings. Entertain questions and comments as they arise so that clarity is achieved. Reassure them that their journals are theirs alone. They can use the daily lessons and activities to fuel their writings.

Guided Practice *30 Minutes*

Introduce the two novels that the students can choose to read (one of the two or both can be used depending on the allotted time frame in the class). Show the two videos/vignettes that summarize the content of each text and generate interest for the young readers. Ask the students the following questions to generate discussion:

- What makes these stories interesting?
- How do they share their stories? Is it effective?
- What do they have in common?

- Do you think the characters have a good sense of self (you may need to discuss what this phrase means)? Do they know who they are? Or do they believe that the characters are still trying to find out who they want to be?
- Do you believe you share anything in common with them?

Closure*15 Minutes*

Break the students into small groups. Distribute large sheet paper (butcher paper or posters) and markers. Have the students create a Venn diagram to analyze similarities and differences between themselves and the character(s) of the books. Each group will choose to focus on one text based upon the knowledge that they have gleaned from the vignettes and class discussion. At the end of fifteen minutes have groups share out their predictions. Save the posters for future class discussion and editing throughout the unit.

Independent Practice*10 Minutes*

Collect the Worksheet #1 to use as a tool for future work (the Paper Bag--Treasure Box). Distribute Assignment #1 to each student and explain its task. This should be completed by the next session. Model a good submission for the students by reading an example of your own. End the session by encouraging students to remember that their submission will be later used in their memoir creation. If time allows, let students begin to write for their assignment in their personal journals.

Name_____

Date_____

Worksheet 1: Treasure Box!

I. Today you will begin in the process of creating something special...a story about yourself! Let's get started by writing a short paragraph that describes the meaningful thing you brought to class today, and why it's important to you. Use the space below.

II. In this unit, you will use a "Treasure Box" to hold all your written assignments. The Treasure Box will be a symbol of the treasure you find when you complete your task in writing your own story. Use the paper that is on your desk to decorate and create a Treasure Box that represents your personality, attitude and general self. Remember that this Treasure Box will be your representation of yourself, so be sure to be mindful of what you do!

You may use:

- markers
- crayons
- colored pencils
- construction paper
- glue
- scissors

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 1: Who I Really Am!

I. For your first writing sample, it would be a great idea to first establish who you *really* are. Be sure to think about the things that you believe are true about yourself or that your family or friends say that is really interesting about you. Are you good at sports? Can you sing? Do you like to cook or do you like to paint or draw? Share anything you like. What about your likes and dislikes? Keep these in mind as well. Fill in the chart below to help you start your thought process.

Things I am good at:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Things I need to work on:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

People that I am friends with/love:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Things I want to do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If I had three wishes:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What I think I will accomplish with my story:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

II. Now that you have written down some ideas, start thinking about writing your first writing sample! Put together all the things you have written down along with anything else that may have come to mind and write down your response to bring to our next session. Happy writing!

Lesson 2—“The One Day I Wish I Could Do Over”

“The One Day I Wish I Could Do Over” Lesson Duration: 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will develop inference and foreshadowing in literary text.
- Students will learn about fiction and creative non-fiction.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Pencils
- Worksheets: Face Time, *Poptastic!* and Assignment #2
- Balloons with Student Descriptions--See *Poptastic!* in Resources Appendix

Anticipatory Set

15 Minutes

At the beginning of class, pass out the *Face Time* worksheet. Share directions and explain that this worksheet will be a tool for finding a partner to work with at given times. Hold up the Face Time clock and explain that the lines are where each student is to write down the name of their “Appointment” for each hour. There is to be no repetition of persons if possible. They are to go around the classroom, asking their classmates if they are available at any particular time. If so, they are to write this person’s name down at that time while the other person write down the first person’s name. This is to ensure that all students are meeting and working with someone new

throughout the unit. Allow students to begin finding their appointments for their Face Time clock.

Direct Instruction: *15 Minutes*

Teacher begins a discussion on the readings that should have been completed for this class. Without being story specific, ask the students whether they are enjoying their texts, and if they are starting to see the character(s) more clearly. Ask if their preconceived ideas were correct.

Next, the teacher directs the attention of the students back to the diagrams made during the previous lesson. Students are allowed to reconvene their original groups and asked to revisit their previous day's assumptions of the shared characteristics of the main character(s) and themselves. Encourage students to look deeper into the mentalities and actions of the members of their books and analyze what their own beliefs and values are in return. Ten minutes into the group work, have groups share out what their revised diagrams revealed.

Extension opportunity: Study guide questions for Chapter 1, each text.

Guided Practice *30 Minutes*

Tell the students to meet with their appointment at whatever time you designate. They are to share their journal writing on Assignment #1 (Who I Really Am). This sharing opportunity will give kids the chance to get feedback about their writing and a chance to learn about each other. Circulate the room, confirming that students are focused and that they are giving each other positive feedback and encouragement as their stories are shared.

Return the students back to their assigned places. Start a discussion on what defines a story as a memoir. Begin by reading excerpts from the two novels that give a detailed account of the main character(s) and ask the students to orally brainstorm ideas for a memoir's defining identity. Ask the students the following questions to generate thoughtful discussion:

- Are memoirs true stories? Are they made up? Can they be both?
- What do memoirs tell the reader? Is it a reflection of someone's interior lives or their experiences? Is there a difference?
- Are memoirs relevant? To whom?
- Do you think writing down your thoughts and memories help you to better understand yourself? Will it help others to know more about who you are as well?
- What is the role of honesty in writing your memoir? Can a memoir be truly relevant if honesty is missing? Were the characters in the stories honest? How can you tell?

Closure*15 Minutes*

Play the game *Poptastic!*. Have each student grab a balloon, pop it, and read the name and associated positive adjective of the person whose name is written inside. Next, that person whose name was read will explain why that adjective about themselves is accurate and give a life example portraying that characteristic in a brief description for the class to hear. As the facilitator, promote positivity and encouragement, offering answers and aid as needed. As they complete their self-review, they are to grab another balloon, pop it, and move the process along. The goal of this activity is to promote self-analysis. At the end of the game, remind students that memoirs always include, in some way, a reflection of the author. Therefore, it is important for students to remember the importance of reflecting upon themselves as they write. Ask students to return to their desks and collect Assignment #1 from each student to place in their Treasure Chest.

Independent Practice*10 Minutes*

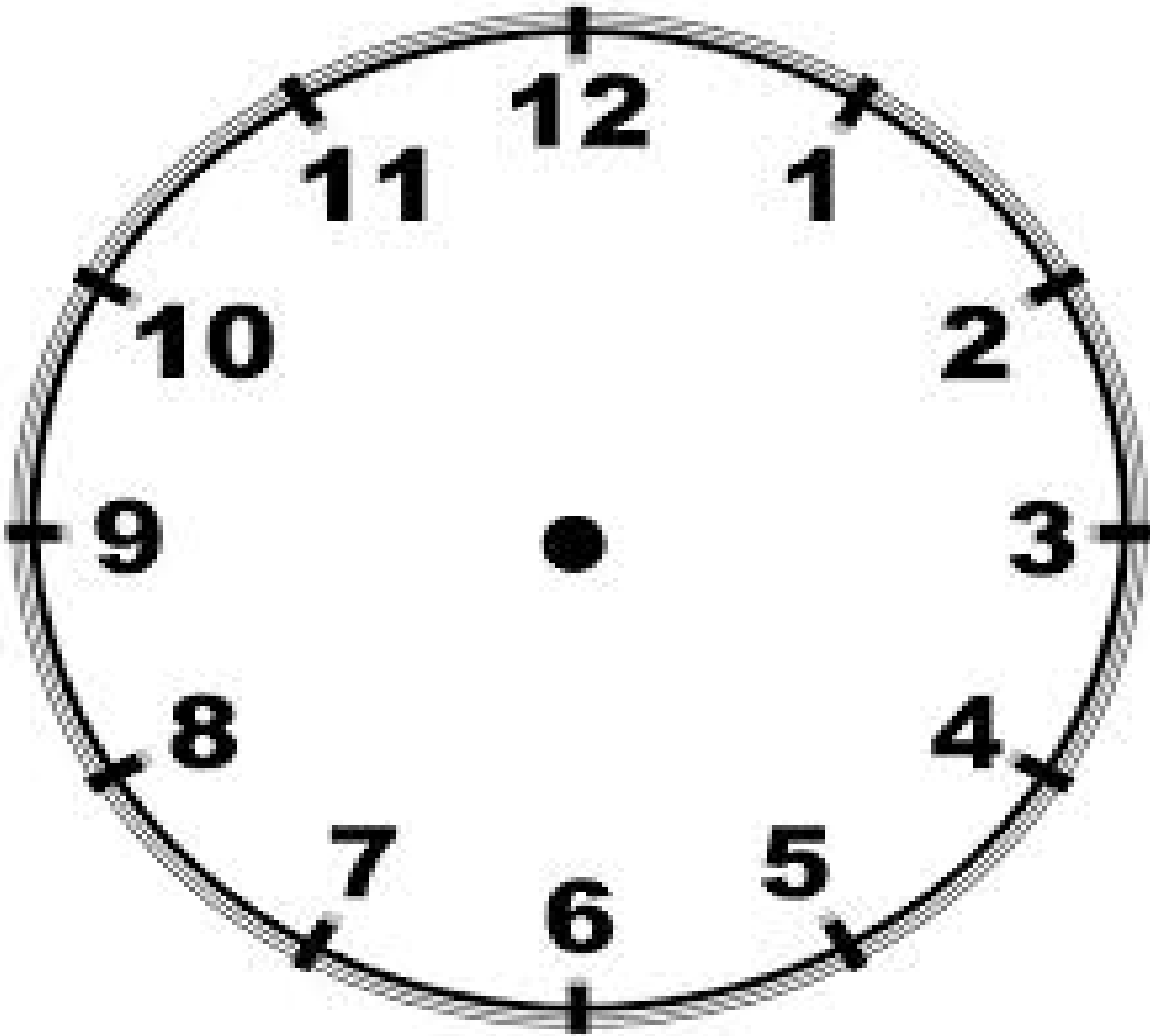
Distribute Assignment #2 to each student and explain its task that should be completed by the next session. Introduce the next lesson by prompting a discussion of a day that stands out as one of the most important days of your life, life-changing. Ask the students to take out their journals and have them free-write for five minutes about their most life changing day/event. If time allows, have a few volunteers share a brief synopsis of their writings and prompt students to consider why these days stick in their minds as being important.

Name _____

Date _____

Face Time

Directions: On the clock below you see lines upon which you can write. When your teacher tells you to begin, you need to go around the classroom and fill in the names of your classmates who will be your “appointment” for that particular hour. For example, you will ask a classmate if they are available at 1:00. They will either respond yes, and you will write their name down on the line for 1:00, or they will say no and you will continue to search for a classmate available at that time. Continue finding appointments until all your times are filled in. You can only use each person once.



Activity: Poptastic!

This game is an excellent opportunity to encourage positive feedback and esteem building within a classroom. The teacher will need simple materials.

- Balloons (enough for the class to each have one)
- Small strips of paper with each student's name upon one
-

Preparation: Insert into each balloon a strip of paper with a student's name on it. Then, blow up each balloon, knot it up and store some place handy.

Game: Distribute balloons to each student, instructing them to not pop the balloon until directed to do so. Start the game by asking one student to pop their balloon. They are then to read the name inside and describe that person with a positive adjective. Next, the person who was described will need to explain why that adjective is true about him/her. If needed, the class or teacher can help with prompting positive descriptions and ideas. The game will proceed once the student has explained the description to the class by popping the next balloon and continuing the process.

Ex) *Student 1*--- John is athletic. *Student 2*--- I am athletic because I am on the football team at school.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 2: The Day My Life Changed

I. For your second writing sample, you are going to discuss an important event that you believe changed your life. It can be something big or simple, but it needs to be significant to you. Start by thinking about the experiences you have had growing up and how they have affected you.

1. What day or time of year did it occur? _____

2. Were you alone when it happened or with someone? Who? _____

3. How did you feel after it occurred?

4. Did it change you for better or for worse? Why do you think the way you do? _____

5. Now discuss exactly what happened. If you have forgotten the details, you can come back to that later. Just get the basics down. _____

II. Now that you have written down some ideas, start thinking about writing your second writing sample! Put together all the things you have written down along with anything else that may have come to mind and write down your response to bring to our next session. Happy writing!

Lesson 3—“The Day My Life Changed”

“The Day My Life Changed”

Lesson Duration: 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will develop inference and foreshadowing in literary text.
- Students will make comparisons of themselves with others.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Data projector (or other Audio/visual equipment) that is internet capable to show a YouTube video
- Video on Stuart Mangan <http://youtu.be/maz8UHHa9PA>
- Worksheet #2: Think-Pair-Share, Assignment #3
- Study Guide questions
- Video on The Three Doctors <http://youtu.be/3F0-c-8XIoo>

Anticipatory Set

20 Minutes

Begin the day's class with the YouTube video *The Day My Life Changed*. Preview the video with a brief history of Stuart Mangan, a young Englishman who, during a game of rugby, received a spine shattering injury that turned this athletic man into a quadriplegic. This video that the students are about to see came into being due to a collective effort from his friends and family to help him share his story.

Video: <http://youtu.be/maz8UHHa9PA>

Directed Instruction:

After the video, share a brief reading about the character Rameck Harris in WBTS who broke another kid's neck and how he sprayed silly string in a teacher's face and got suspended. Next, share a brief reading from THOMS when Esperanza talked about her experience being shamed by the nun at the school's canteen. Each situation showed a time when each character had a life-changing experience. Encourage students to talk about their thoughts on this part of the story and how it altered the character's lives.

- Can a simple act or occurrence change your life in an instant? Can it be for the better or for the worst?
- Can things that seem bad at first really be something good? Can you give an example of that in the story that you are reading? Why do you believe that to be true in that instance?
- Do your experiences make you into the person you are? How or why not?

Guided Practice: *35 Minutes*

Pass out copies of Worksheet #2 to the students (Think-Pair-Share) along with corresponding study guide questions from their perspective texts. These questions can be found in the Resources Appendix. *Think* Ask students to read through the questions first quietly, giving serious thought to the answers that they want to give. *Pair* Group the students up with similarly reading partners and ask them to fill out the template for the TPS worksheet. *Share* Next, have student groups give their feedback on the answers they submitted on the TPS worksheet. Encourage students to share their thoughts on each question, and remind them that disagreement on points of view are okay as long as it is done respectfully and with compassion. Whenever a dispute arises, make a note of it on the board and have students make clear points supporting why they believe one way or the other. In this way, students can learn to build a logically supported argument to support their viewpoints. Be sure to collect the students' work and questions at the end of class. They will have the opportunity to revisit their work during Lesson 7.

Closure *15 Minutes*

End the lesson with a brief video of Rameck Hunt and his companions talking about how they have changed and what they now dedicate their lives to doing. Remind students to think about how Hunt changed from his previous persona of being a street kid to being a medical doctor who is a role model.

Video: <http://youtu.be/3F0-c-8XIoo>

Independent Practice *10 Minutes*

Collect Assignment #2 and place in their Treasure Boxes. Distribute Assignment #3 to each student and explain its task that should be completed by the next class session. Explain that this assignment has them to write a letter to someone, either presently in their lives or not, explaining to this person why they are their hero. Tell them to be sure to address all the ways that this person is important to their lives, and to discuss how they have affected them. Ask the students to take out their journals and have them free-write for five minutes about their most influential person. If time allows, have a few volunteers share a brief synopsis of their writings and prompt students to consider why these people stick in their minds as important.

Name _____

Date _____

Worksheet 2: Think-Pair-Share

Directions: Take out the study guide for your novel and complete the questions assigned by your teacher on the Think-Pair-Share diagram below.

Think!

Pair!

Share!

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Name _____

Date _____

Study Guide: The House on Mango Street***

This study guide is a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of the text. Complete the questions associated with the story and discuss your findings in class. This should be completed in your journals.

- Where did the narrator live before she moved to **The House on Mango Street**? How were her previous homes different?
- In what kind of house would she like to live? Does her new home live up to her expectations? Why not?
"Hairs"
- Who are the members of Esperanza's family?
"My Name"
- After who was Esperanza named? What does her namesake's story tell you about the status of women in Mexican society?
"Cathy Queen of Cats"
- Why is Cathy's family about to move?
"Our Good Day"
- How does Esperanza make friends with Lucy and Rachel? What makes them better friends than Cathy?
"Marin"
- Who is Marin? Why is she unable to leave her house? How does she plan to change her situation? Why do Esperanza and her friends admire her?
"Those Who Don't"
- How do outsiders see Esperanza's neighborhood? How does Esperanza feel when she visits other neighborhoods?
"There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn't Know What to Do"
- Why does Rosa Vargas cry every day? Why do her children misbehave? What happens to her son Angel?
"Alicia Who Sees Mice"
- How does Alicia's father treat her efforts to get an education?
"The Family of Little Feet"
- What happens to Esperanza when she and her friends are given some cast-off shoes? How do the shoes change them? What effect do they have on the men in the neighborhood?
"A Rice Sandwich"
- Why does Esperanza want to eat in the school canteen? How does she get her mother to help her?
"Hips"
- What are the girls doing as they talk about hips? What are hips good for? What does their conversation tell you about their ages?

"The First Job"

- Why does this story have a misleading title? What happens to Esperanza on her first day at work? What does this episode tell you about her family and their expectations?

"Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark"

- Why does Esperanza's father cry? How does his crying make her feel?

"Born Bad"

- What happens to Aunt Lupe? Why does Esperanza believe she deserves to go to hell? What special relationship did Esperanza have with her aunt?

"Geraldo No Last Name"

- Why does Geraldo have no last name? From the information Cisneros provides, do you believe that his death was inevitable?

"Sire"

- Why is Esperanza afraid of Sire? What do her parents think of him? Why is she so curious about what he does with Lois, and why does this curiosity make her feel as though "everything is holding its breath inside me" [73]?

"No Speak English"

- What eight English words—or, really, phrases—does Mamacita know? What do they tell you about the ways in which Mexican immigrants relate to the "official," English-speaking culture outside their communities?

"Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays"

- What is making Rafaela grow old? Who was Rapunzel, and why would Rafaela dream of having hair like hers?

"Sally"

- Describe the relationship between Sally and her father. How do her schoolmates see her? What transformation takes place when Sally comes home?

"Minerva Writes Poems"

- Why does Minerva write poems? Why is she black and blue when she comes to visit Esperanza?

"Bums in the Attic"

- What does Esperanza's father do for a living? Why has Esperanza stopped joining her family on their Sunday outings?

"Beautiful & Cruel"

- What is the nature of Esperanza's "quiet war" [89]? Against whom—or what—is she fighting?

"A Smart Cookie"

- How would you categorize the things Esperanza's mother knows? What things might she not know that Esperanza does? Why do you think she left school?

"The Monkey Garden"/"Red Clowns"/"Linoleum Roses"

- How does the Monkey Garden change? What does Sally do that makes Esperanza so angry? From whom is she trying to save her? What eventually happens to Sally? How does Esperanza feel about her marriage?

"The Three Sisters"

- How does Esperanza meet the three sisters? What kind of future do they predict for her? What is the responsibility they place on her?

"Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes"

- How does the ending of **The House on Mango Street** complete a circle?

***Questions are sourced by the Random House Academic Resources/Vintage Books Reading Group Center (Trachtenberg)

Name_____

Date_____

Study Guide: We Beat the Street***

I. This study guide is a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of the text. Complete the questions associated with the story and discuss your findings in class. This should be completed in your journals.

1. We Beat The Street is a true story, a biography. How does the blending of real events into story form make for a successful telling of the lives of real people? Since the writer did not witness the conversations of the young men when they were growing up, how can the past be captured effectively and honestly?
2. The story of the three doctors is told in chronological order through the eyes of the young men as they progressed through hardships and triumphs in their lives. How does this method of telling the story affect the reader's response?
3. As you first meet Sampson, what kind of person does he seem to be? What seem to be his strengths and weaknesses? What personality traits does he have that make him potentially able to be a success? What strengths do you find in his family and home life? What negatives do you observe?
4. As you first meet Rameck, what kind of person does he seem to be? What seem to be his strengths and weaknesses? What personality traits does he have that make him potentially able to be a success? What strengths do you find in his family and home life? What negatives do you observe?
5. As you first meet George, what kind of person does he seem to be? What seem to be his strengths and weaknesses? What personality traits does he have that make him potentially able to be a success? What strengths do you find in his family and home life? What negatives do you observe?
6. How are the teenage years of the three young men similar to teens today? How is it different? What extra challenges did they face as teenagers?
7. What do you know of the city of Newark in general, and more specifically, the neighborhoods the young men lived in, from the descriptions given in the text? How would you describe the social structure, family structure, and cultural structure of the community?
8. The three young men found great strength, inspiration, and encouragement in music, particularly rap music. Explore the importance of artistic influences on individuals as well as groups of people. How can self-expression be used as a tool for helping or healing?
9. Describe the horrors of the brief prison incarcerations of Rameck and Sampson. How do those experiences change them for the better?
10. Describe the program at Seton Hall as described in the book. What is it about that program that allowed the three young men to become successful? What difficulties did they still have to overcome?

11. What is the attitude of the three young men concerning learning, studying, and acquiring knowledge? How did they deal with friends who looked down on them or made fun of them for excelling in school or for dreaming of college?
12. Discuss the strengthening friendship among the three young men as they go through college and medical school. How is each young man unique? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? What does each individual offer that the other two need?
13. What makes a friendship? How can friends be both an asset and a liability? How does one keep the valuable friends and stay away from the negative friends?
14. Describe the feelings of the three doctors as they graduate from high school. Describe the feelings of the three doctors as they graduate from college.
15. Describe the feelings of the three doctors as they graduate from medical school. What have the three doctors learned about themselves, their past and their future as they complete medical school?
16. Explain the title of the book. Why does the title have more than one possible interpretation? Use specific examples from the book to support your answer.
17. Why don't more young men succeed like the three doctors? What social and cultural problems prevent their success? What can be done to increase the possibility of success in other young men such as these?
18. Discuss the instances of failure in the lives of the three doctors. Passing exams, getting the right placement, etc. How do these seemingly overwhelming obstacles help to make them stronger?
19. What predictions can you make about the three doctors in the next ten years? Will the three of them still be together as friends and colleagues, or will they have gone their separate ways? Explain your answer.
20. What did you learn about survival, success, endurance, hardship and determination from the reading of this book? How has it changed your thinking, if any?

***Questions and study guide created by Sharon Draper (Draper)

Name_____

Date_____

Assignment 3: You Mean A Lot to Me!

I. For your third writing sample, you are going to discuss the most important person to you! Be sure to use the prompts below to organize your thoughts and feelings.

1. Who is the most important person to you? _____

2. Why are they so important? How do they make you feel? _____

3. Describe something that they did that affected you deeply. Did you let them know?

4. Did they change you for better or for worse? Why do you think the way you do? _____

5. If you could tell them how much they are important to you, what would you say?

II. Now that you have written down some ideas, start thinking about writing your third writing sample! Put together all the things you have written down along with anything else that may have come to mind and write down your response to bring to our next session. Happy writing!

Lesson 4—“You Mean A Lot to Me!” and Revision Day

“You Mean A Lot to Me!” Lesson Duration: 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will reflect and critique the writings of self and others.
- Students will learn about fiction and creative non-fiction.

- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Worksheet #3: Self/Peer Assessment, Assignment #4
- Pencils and paper

Anticipatory Set *5 Minutes*

At the beginning of class, indicate to the students that it is a Revision Workshop Day. Assemble the students into pairs by giving them a Face Clock time. Also, ask students to make any last revisions/corrections on the Assignment #3 which they will read to their partner. Allow them to omit anything they deem too private.

Directed Instruction: *20 minutes*

After the students have assembled into pairs, give the directive that students should exchange their letters that they have written to their designated hero/most influential person. They are to read each other’s letter quietly without talking. As they read, teacher will pass out Worksheet #3 (Self/Peer Assessment). As they finish, model self-revision by showing a teacher-created example on the board. Walk students through the techniques that follow:

- Read passage aloud, or if you prefer, exchange papers and read the papers silently. How does it sound?
- Ask another person to read your work. What parts do they like the best? Why?
- Highlight the questions that arise about meaning. How can you make the meaning more clear?
- Write down your revisions. Is the result a better product? Is meaning clear?

Doing this revision with the worksheet will help students to have more clarity and guidance about how to give good feedback on their work--Worksheet #3 (Self/Peer Assessment). Clarify that there will be two versions of revision--their own and their partners’. Check that students understand the process of revision and understand the necessity of checking back on the clarity and precision of their work through the teacher model.

Guided Practice: *35 Minutes*

Writing Workshop. Distribute the Treasure Boxes with all their current submissions. Indicate that students are to revise and analyze their writings, both their own and their partner's, using the process learned above. While it is imperative that students utilize the process to do their own work, do not discourage them from working with their Face Time partner to check for clarity and to get immediate feedback. This is a process of the revision that is necessary for the students to embrace. As the instructor, circulate around the class keeping the students on task for the work at hand. Give suggestions and aid as needed. At the end of the Writing Workshop, ask students to return to their desks.

Independent Practice *10 Minutes*

Direct the students' attention to their journals. Give students the following prompt:

“Writing about my experiences has given me _____ about myself. I also _____ about my connections with my community. I have also found recurring patterns in my life and find that I share common experiences and beliefs as the characters in the book _____.”

Ask students to give thought to this statement, and give possible entries with the class (Example: *Writing about my experiences has given me insight about myself. I also am proud of my connections with my community....etc.*). Encourage students to write freely addressing the statements in this journal entry for the next ten minutes. Instruct students to indicate what is true about this statement, make it their own, and show in their writing how it is true about them.

Closure *15 Minutes*

At the end of the Writing Workshop, ask students to collect their writings, place them in order, and to return them into their Treasure Boxes. Let students know that the Treasure Boxes will be reviewed by the teacher today to determine that students are making satisfactory progress in the creation of their memoir. If time allows, be sure to jot down feedback about the student's work in the margins as necessary. Pass out the next assignment, Assignment #4 to each student and instruct them to email (or bring, depending upon the school's capability) a copy (or photograph) related to the story they write about for a visual. It is also important to remind students that teacher permission should be granted before the item can be presented in class.

Name_____

Date_____

Worksheet 3: Self/Peer-Assessment

Directions: With your partner, exchange your work and give each other positive and helpful feedback on the work you have completed. Use the template below to direct your assessment.

1. Does the writing entry have a title?
2. Is there an evident beginning, middle and end?

3. Does the storyline work when read aloud? Does it make sense?
4. What is one thing you really like about this writing entry?
5. What is something that can maybe be changed or worked on?
6. Are there any misspelled words or punctuation errors?
7. Can you suggest anything to help this passage?
8. On a scale to 1 - 10 with 10 being the highest score, what would you say this passage would get? Why? Give your reason below.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 4: Free Write

I. For your fourth writing sample, you are going to have the chance to write about anything that you haven't had the chance to write about yet. What is a story about you that needs to be told, but hasn't been heard yet?

1. Identify the relevant persons in the story. _____

2. What happened? What events took place? _____

3. Describe how you reacted. Would you change anything about the story if you could? _____

4. Who else knows about this story? Why should this story be told? _____

II. Now that you have written down some ideas, start thinking about writing your third writing sample! Put together all the things you have written down along with anything else that may have come to mind and write down your response to bring to our next session. Happy writing!

Lesson 5—“Free Write Day”

“Free Write Day” **Lesson Duration:** 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will produce a written submission that is self-directed.

- Students will organize their thoughts into written text.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Clean Paper
- Pencils

Anticipatory Set *5 Minutes*

At the beginning of class, be sure to collect the submissions students have from Assignment #4. Next, indicate to the students that it is a Free Write Day. Assemble students into pairs by giving them a Face Clock time. Allow students to arrange themselves with their partners.

Directed Instruction: *15 minutes*

Teacher begins the class with an explanation of what the Free Write Day looks like. Free Write Day is important for students to participate in to be able to explore topics that they are interested in but haven't had a chance to explore. Begin with a brainstorming activity to jumpstart the students with their writing. Often, middle school students (or students in general) need an extra boost to get the creative juices flowing. First, share with the students the prompt for the day:

Prompt: *What connections do I share with the main character(s) of the story? What have I learned about myself and others through those connections? How does my sense of connection affect the way I see myself and others?*

Do a Mind Map or Idea Web to organize the ideas that students generate. Give some direction but allow students to come up with their own ideas.

Guided Practice: *35 Minutes*

Distribute to the class a clean sheet of paper. Along with their Face Time partner, instruct students to come up with a Mind Map/Idea Web of their thoughts/ideas of the connections that they have found with the stories they have been reading. As the instructor, it is important to circulate ensuring ideas are flowing freely and that students who are struggling with ideas are given prompting to complete the activity. Leave the class created Mind Map on the board.

Independent Practice

15 Minutes

Direct students back to their own seats. Give them 15 minutes to now begin their writing gleaned ideas and motivation from their personal Mind Maps. As students are writing, play softly in the background music that is reflective of the stories the students are reading. Let students know that the music will be playing and why--to give inspiration for the thought process. If it becomes a distraction, stop playing.

Closure

10 Minutes

Collect the Free Writes from the students and place them into the Treasure Boxes. Start a discussion on the music that is playing in the background and why it is relevant to the stories being read. Ask students to chat about what role music and art have in the identity of a person, and whether or not the chosen art or music is a true reflection of who they are right now. Encourage students to jot down interesting points made during the discussion in their journals for future reference. Ask students to keep these points in mind in preparation of the next lesson's task. Direct students to use the interim time to revise their work, and to come up with ideas to fill out their current submissions.

Lesson 6 –“Creative Self”

“Creative Self” **Lesson Duration:** 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will infer meaning in photographs, art and music.
- Students will critique the efficacy of photographs, music and art.

- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Character Diagrams (made first day of class)
- Video: <http://youtu.be/SOOjvcvwrCg>
- Music player (mp3, computer with speakers, etc).
- Worksheets #4 and #5: Art and Music Worksheet and The Art of Photography, and Assignment #5
- Post-its

Anticipatory Set

10 Minutes

As students enter the class, teachers should have music playing that is representative of the music that reflects the stories that are being read. Have hanging on the walls all the diagrams created by the students at the beginning of the unit in clear view. On the Smart Board/Data Projector, either have teacher located photos and art work from various modern artists on a continuous loop or play the video identified above. Arranged on students' desks, have Worksheet #4 which instructs students to answer questions about the music and art on the projector and the characters in their chosen texts. Explain that this activity is to help the student make connections with music and art, and how they shape identity.

Directed Instruction:

35 minutes

Teacher begins the class with a discussion over the questions in Worksheet #4. Each student is encouraged to give their feedback on their beliefs about how music and art can be linked to the characters. Designate a Face Time, and ask students to assemble with their designated appointment. Ask students to take along their journals as well. Announce to the class that you will begin talking about the music/art that each student has chosen with a directed activity to help focus their thoughts. Have the following questions written on the board:

- How does this music/art show who I am inside?
- Why does it speak to me?
- How can I share this as an important part of myself in my memoir?
- Do others think this art/music is a part of my identity? Why or why not? Does it matter?

Ask the students to discuss their thoughts with the questions in mind regarding their submission, and after five minutes of discussion, give the students ten minutes to write down their responses in their journals.

Guided Practice: *20 Minutes*

Photo blogging: Take the students to the website for the Latino Photography Project {galleryrouteone.org/latino-photo-project/}. Pass out to the students the Worksheet #5 (Photo's meanings) and have them quickly write down their response to the photos that come across the screen. Encourage them to go with their first impressions, and to not think too deeply about what they think they need to say. After the photo slideshow is finished, revisit the photographs and ask students to share their impressions and thoughts on the photos. After students have shared, give them the legend/background on the photos to give the students context. Discussion questions:

- Was the objective of the photographer evident?
- Do you believe that the message came across through the photograph?
- Is this photo a "good" one? Why or why not?

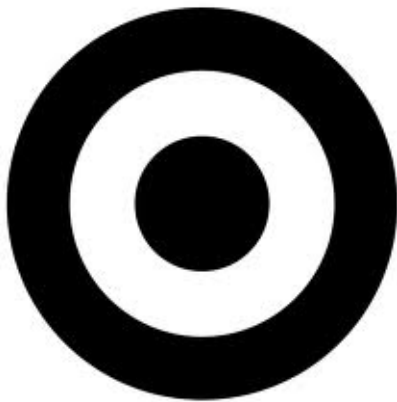
Independent Practice *15 Minutes*

Distribute Assignment #5. Let students know that they are to spend the interim time taking pictures that tell a story of their personal selves. Let them know that cell phone pictures and hand held cameras are all acceptable, but they must be shared with you before the next class period. This can be done either digitally (email or Google Drive) or physical copies of photographs. If students are unsure about what sort of pictures they are to take, encourage them to reflect on the topics that we have reviewed in class. Also, students can take an entirely new route and find a subject that we haven't discussed in class yet holds high interest for them. Give students a brief overview of how Google Presentation or PowerPoint can be used to create a digital visual presentation. The teacher can model an example by creating one of his/her own. Also, if time allows and the teacher is technically gifted enough, instruct students on how to include music to accompany their work. Give students a chance to begin working on the project. Direct students to utilize the directions and rubric in Assignment #5 as a guide. Make sure students understand that they will be presenting these presentations in the next class.

Closure *10 Minutes*

Draw a bull's eye on the board with three circles. Identify the three rings as various levels of cohesiveness. Explain that the center ring represents the statement "I am learning a lot about myself!" center ring will be "I'm not sure, but I think I am onto something!" and the outer ring represents "I have no idea what to think about myself!". Pass out to each student a sticky-note and instruct them to write down their names and place the note in the appropriate ring for themselves as they leave. This will give you, the teacher, a quick assessment of the students and how these activities have aided the students toward self-awareness. If any students are in the outer two rings, find a way to connect with them at some time to see how you can offer help to direct them along a more gratifying path.

Example Bulls eye



Name _____

Date _____

Worksheet 4: Art and Music

Directions: As you watch the images and listen to the accompanying music, answer the questions that follow below.

1. How does the art make you feel?

2. How does the music make you feel?
3. Describe how the music and the images work together. What is the resulting mood?
4. Do you believe that the mood in the presentation would be different with different music?
5. Is there anything about the presentation that reminds you about your character(s) in the book?
How?
6. Do you like this presentation? Why or why not?

Name_____

Date_____

Worksheet 5: The Art of Photography

Directions: As you look at the photographs, answer the questions that follow below.

1. How does the photo make you feel?

2. Do you believe the photographer was trying to send a message? What do you believe that the message was?
3. Describe how the objects in the photo work together. What is the resulting mood?
4. Do you believe that the mood in the photograph would be different with different lighting, color or subjects?
5. Is there anything about the presentation that reminds you about your character(s) in the book? How?
6. Do you like these photographs? Why or why not?

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 5: Pictures Tell A Story

I. For your fifth writing sample, you are going to have the chance to write about the photographs that you are going to take in the next interim period. Using a camera or a cell phone, take pictures that tell a story about your life and give a ‘snapshot’ image of your identity.

II. Next, create *ten* (10) images that you believe you want to share with the class and that gives a good overview of your identity. With the photographs, you can now create a PowerPoint presentation that you can narrate as you show your pictures. Be sure to address the subject(s) of the photos, a brief history/background to give context and why it is important. A sample script follows:

“This picture is a photograph of _____ (subject) _____. The (subject) doing this because _____ (basic history/background) _____. This picture is important because _____ (your reason) _____.”

II. Follow the rubric below to confirm you have completed all that is necessary. If you have any questions, be sure to consult with your teacher! Happy writing.

	1	2	3	4
Photographs	Student has only two or three photographs.	Student has only four to six photographs.	Student only has seven to nine photographs.	Student has the required ten photographs.
Narration	Student gives very little information, context or reasoning.	Student gives some information, context and reasoning.	Student gives good information, context and reasoning.	Student gives extensive information on the subject, a clear context and clear reasoning for the photograph.
Presentation	Student has a very poorly organized and poorly created presentation.	Student completes a disorganized but simple presentation.	Student completes an organized and simple presentation.	Student completes a comprehensive and innovative presentation.
Participation	Student does little participation.	Student does minimal participation.	Student participates as requested.	Student shows motivation with involved participation.
Totals				

Total Score = _____

Lesson 7 --Pictures Tell A Story

“Pictures Tell A Story” Lesson Duration: 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will execute an oral personal reflection.
- Students will learn about fiction and creative non-fiction.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Data projector/Smart Board
- Student submissions for their presentations
- Study guide questions for focal texts
- Worksheet #6: Self/Peer Assessment-Presentation

Anticipatory Set *15 Minutes*

Introduce to the students the upcoming video by sharing “What’s Your Story?”. Ask them to think about their life story only told in five pictures--what five pictures would you choose? Begin viewing the TED talk by Andrea Johnston “What’s Your Story?”

Video: http://youtu.be/yiTbV8yJe_g

Directed Instruction: *40 minutes*

Pass out to students Worksheet #6 (Peer Assessment). The students may need several copies depending upon the number of students in the class. Instruct students on how to assess each other as the presentations are being done, and encourage students to remember to be encouraging and uplifting in their comments and reflections. Take a few minutes to confirm all the students have shared with you a digital copy of their presentations. Next, call students up one by one to do their presentations. This should be done through a Smart Board or data projector so that all students may have the opportunity to experience the photos in their presentations. As students present, stand near the back to determine that all students are paying close attention and are filling out the peer assessments. The presentations will probably take the majority of the class period, but this is good practice in preparation to the upcoming memoir presentations at the end of the unit.

Guided Practice: *15 Minutes*

At the end of the presentations, collect the peer assessments separate and distribute to the students for their immediate feedback. If students wish to keep them, allow them to place the peer assessments in their backpacks to take home.

Independent Practice *15 Minutes*

Announce to the students that there will be a quick assessment of the stories that they are reading. Revisit the study guide questions from the Resource Appendix and give students a Face Time appointment to work on finishing the questions to show understanding of the text. At the end of the allotted time, collect the students' work. These can be graded for a score.

Closure *10 Minutes*

Ask students to reflect on the process of learning what the process of exploring some of the pieces of themselves has been like. Has it been rewarding? Confusing? Fulfilling? Give students the time to do this reflection in their journals. Announce to the students that the next class session will have them beginning to tie it all together with another Writing Workshop for Lesson 8.

Worksheet 6: Self/Peer-Assessment-Presentation

Name of Presenter _____

Directions: As your classmates complete their presentations, give them feedback on their work and how well they did. Use the template below to direct your assessment.

How did you do? 1 2 3 4

How did I like your presentation? 1 2 3 4

What I liked best: _____

Name of Presenter _____

Directions: As your classmates complete their presentations, give them feedback on their work and how well they did. Use the template below to direct your assessment.

How did you do? 1 2 3 4

How did I like your presentation? 1 2 3 4

What I liked best: _____

Name of Presenter _____

Directions: As your classmates complete their presentations, give them feedback on their work and how well they did. Use the template below to direct your assessment.

How did you do? 1 2 3 4

How did I like your presentation? 1 2 3 4

What I liked best: _____

Lesson 8 --Bring It All Together: Finding Patterns and Constructing a Final Product

“All Together, Now” **Lesson Duration:** 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will analyze patterns within their writings.
- Students will organize their writings in a logical manner.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Treasure Boxes
- Reviewed and assessed writings (done by the teacher) with feedback
- Worksheet #7: Bring It Together and Make Connections

Anticipatory Set

15 Minutes

During this class session, the teacher will have five to fifteen minute mini-conferences with each student. The mini-conferences will give the student the chance to speak directly with the teacher regarding the feedback given on their work within their Treasure Boxes. As students filter in, distribute the Treasure Boxes to each one with instructions to quietly read through their work, and to process the comments written for each one. Allow enough time for students to reflect on what has been written, and to come up with any questions they may have to ask during their mini-conference.

Directed Instruction:

25 minutes

On the board, write the name(s) of the main character(s) within the books they have read. Ask the students to determine if they could find any common themes that were reoccurring throughout the stories. Next, pass out and place on the wall the posters the students made at the beginning of the unit (Making Connections with the Characters). Ask students to reassemble themselves into their original groups and to reassess their ideas about the connections they shared with the main character(s), and whether or not their predictions about the characters were correct. They are to make changes at that time, if necessary.

Next, ask students to return their attention to the characters' names on the board. Students are then to come up with themes that came up in the story and construct a quick map linking them to the names. Encourage all students to participate, and to share their thoughts.

Tell the students to return to their seats and to take out their journals for one last entry for the class. Ask the students to write their names in the center of a page and to start making a map of themselves and the themes that they have found recurring in their own stories. Are there any patterns? Any new or surprising things? Let them have a chance to do this and to reflect.

Guided Practice: *10 Minutes*

Students are to now go through their writings within the Treasure Boxes. They are to begin sifting through their writings and their journals to determine what selections need to be kept, altered, or omitted from the creative project, the memoir. Let students use their journal map they just created to direct their thoughts, and to begin in the self-editing process of their journal.

Independent Practice *30 Minutes*

As students do the self-editing, the teacher calls up students one by one to complete the mini-conference. Use Worksheet #7 to have focused questions to progress the meeting. Ask students to come up to your desk with all materials (written documents and journals) housed within their Treasure Boxes. It might be a good idea to also have a timer to firm a framework of efficiency for the mini-conferences, and stay true to the time. It is important to speak to each student, if possible.

Closure *10 Minutes*

As the class comes to an end, if there still exist students who have not yet had their conferences, try to find a way to meet with them privately before the next session. Also, encourage the students to start the final editing process to type each submission that they have chosen to include within their memoir. Remind the students to use the spell check and proper formatting, and if possible, to save their work on a thumb drive. They are to bring these to the next class session.

Make sure the students are aware that the next class session will be the session of constructing the memoirs into a simple book. Therefore, it would be in the students' best interests to have most if not all the submissions typed and corrected before the next session.

Worksheet 7: Bring It Together and Make Connections

Name _____

Directions: With your teacher in your mini-conference, answer the following questions to start to do the final editing of your memoir.

1. What common themes exist in your writings? Are they evident?

2. Are “you” present throughout the writings? Is what is happening to you apparent?
3. What did you learn and how did you grow? Do you show this in your writing?
4. What do you want others to know about you as a result of reading this story?

Conference Notes:

Lesson 9 --Telling MY Story

“Telling MY Story” Lesson Duration: 80-90 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will organize their personal reflections in text.

- Students will generate a creative non-fiction product.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Computer Lab with printers
- Worksheet #8: Telling MY Story!
- Parent/Guardian Invite Letter

Anticipatory Set

15 Minutes

Students should have all the parts to their memoir prepared (typed) for their Memoir. If there are any students who are not quite finished with the typing of their stories, allow them to finish this by completing them in the computer lab/laptop cart during the Guided Practice piece. Remind students that today is the day when the memoir will be constructed, and that the next lesson will be the day that the memoirs will be shared.

Directed Instruction:

15 minutes

Instruct the students who are prepared to take all their chosen papers out from their Treasure Boxes and to lay them on their desks. Tell the students to put all the papers in proper order. Next, show them a copy of what the end product will look like: a memoir book put together with construction paper and string. Have near the front an unassembled copy of the memoir book as well, and model the construction in full view for the students. Remind students that they will be able to decorate the book as they please. Answer any questions if necessary, checking for understanding.

Guided Practice:

40 Minutes

Assemble students into groups. Distribute among the groups the necessary materials to construct their books. Circulate around the room, giving proper aid to those who are struggling, and help correct any small mistakes that may ensue. Encourage students to decorate their memoirs by

gluing on any photos that they may wish onto their memoirs. They may also simply draw or sketch their decorations, but there is to be on the front and back some sort of personal reflective decoration.

Independent Practice

10 Minutes

As students come to complete their project, share with the students how tomorrow will take place. Let them know that they may invite family members or faculty to witness their presentations and that they will have about ten minutes each to share their work. The teacher will have the classroom arranged in a way to represent a comfortable and intimate performing room, and snacks may be provided, either by the students, parent volunteers or the teacher. There is a letter that can be distributed out to the students including in this curriculum that outlines the event to parents and invited guests. Encourage any student volunteers to come during the interim time before the last lesson to help in setting up the classroom. Students should know to dress nicely, and that they will be reading one entry from their memoirs.

Closure

10 Minutes

Distribute the final Worksheet, Worksheet #8 which is a Review of the unit for the teacher's personal use. Allow students about 10-15 minutes to write about how this unit helped them, and if they enjoyed the process of writing memoir. Let students know that honesty is certainly welcome and encouraged. Collect them at the end and read through for personal reflection and adjustment if necessary.

Name _____

Date _____

Worksheet 8: Telling MY Story!

Directions: In order to learn more about how this unit has helped you, give feedback on what worked for you, and how this writing process has helped you to learn more about yourself and others. Feel free to write without restraint, and be honest about your experiences--your response is anonymous.

1. Did this unit help you to enjoy reading more? Why or why not?
2. Did this unit help you to enjoy writing more? Why or why not?
3. What did you learn and how did you grow? Do you think this will affect you in the future?
4. Are you proud of the product you have created? What about the process did you enjoy the most?
5. What else would you like to say? Please write down your response below.

Date _____

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The students of my class and I are happy to invite you to our presentation of our literary creations—our personal memoirs. The students have worked extremely hard on their memoirs and we want to celebrate this phenomenal achievement.

Please join us at _____ in classroom _____ for sampled readings and display of our created works. We are asking that parents and guardians contribute a refreshment item that can be enjoyed at the end of our program, and of course we welcome any volunteers who could set up and distribute the refreshments at the appointed time. Thanks for all your anticipated support! Please send your response below by _____ so that we can have adequate preparations and be sure to expect you. We are truly looking forward to this most momentous day!

Sincerely,

_____ Yes, I will be able to attend! (Number attending : _____)

_____ No, I will be unable to attend.

_____ Yes, I can volunteer!

_____ Yes, I can send/bring in _____

Lesson 10 --Sharing My Story

“Sharing my story” Lesson Duration: 100 Minutes, approximately

Grade Level: Middle Years, 6-8

Objectives and Goals:

- Students will summarize their experience with writing memoir.
- Students will learn about fiction and creative non-fiction.
- Students will develop their writing skills through self-discovery.

Significant Concepts:

- What connections do I share with others around me?
- How can I learn from the experiences of others?
- How are the people in my community alike?

Unit Question

What are some of the parts of me that make up who I am and how do they connect me with others?

Required Materials

- Classroom with memoir displays, tables with refreshments (optional)

Anticipatory Set

5 Minutes

The classroom should be prepared for presentations and if possible, have a student standing at the doorway distributing a program to each entrant. The data projector/smart board should also be at the ready in case a student wishes to share a digital copy of an entry of their memoir. Have the memoirs on display on a nearby table.

Directed Instruction:

10 minutes

After a few minutes, call for attention and begin. Start with a brief thanks to all who came and who supported their children's learning. Give a brief overview of what transpired the past ten sessions and how you have seen the students grow. Teacher should fill in the small speech as they see fit. Teacher should act as the Master of Ceremonies, but it can be delegated to a willing student. The idea is to have a celebratory atmosphere that celebrates the achievement of the students in their work.

Guided Practice/Independent Practice:

70 Minutes

Presentations. Give each student around 5 minutes to do their presentations and include 3-5 extra minutes for questions. Encourage light applause at the end of each presentation. Act as the background aid, or delegate a volunteer/volunteers to do such by maintaining the audio/visual equipment, memoir booklets and announcing the next presenter.

Closure*10 Minutes*

As you come to an end, present to each student a certificate commemorating their participation in the Memoir Share class. Allow them to collect their Treasure Boxes, Memoirs and Journals, and encourage them to continue writing. Enjoy the reception with the students and share pride in the hard work that they have done.

Bridging the Literacy Gap*The Failure of Conventional Education and the Search for Reform*

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MALS Final Project
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Introduction

Education within the United States has in recent years become a main point of general attention. Concern about the quality of learning, the status of student achievement and the plight of our graduates generates worries about what our projected future will resemble. Children are failing the standardized tests nationwide, and this has been getting worse year by year. The

literacy gap, the divide between those who have strong reading skills and those who do not, continues to grow and widens more every year. I have seen some strong commonalities in the lack of student achievement (socioeconomic class, parental participation, etc.), but various levels of illiteracy can be seen across the spectrum regardless of membership of any particular grouping. Various states have passed new legislation aimed at reforming the current downtrend, but studies continue to show evidence of the ever-widening gap. Sadly, there is a lot of blame to share all-around, but the truth is something must be done immediately if positive change is to occur. Though I do not believe that there exists a single answer for the dilemma we now face, there can be change implemented in small ways to refashion the future of education, one lesson at a time. With this curriculum, I am attempting to do just that. With a balanced literacy program organized around activities cultivating self-reflection, I believe students can transform their higher-order thinking skills of reading comprehension, interpretation and analysis, all of which are integral to literacy.

The State of Literacy in the U.S. and Public Education

It can go without saying that being literate positively authenticates the future of any given being in an industrialized workforce. Acquiring the skill to read, comprehend, analyze and interpret written text establishes the framework upon which productive citizens can build a stable and productive career. Without this necessary foundation, an individual's future possesses a negative foreboding with studies showing substantially higher poverty rates from those who possess a low level of literacy than those who possess a high literacy rating. But what is literacy exactly? It is more than being able to write one's name and read simple words. In 1991, the year the National Literacy Act was created, the U.S. Congress defined literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency

necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 3*). This evidences the shift in understanding literacy in the past when literacy was defined as simply having the ability to read at a very basic level (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 2*). In the 21st century, literacy includes simple reading as a basic skill juxtaposed with the ability to demonstrate higher level reasoning and problem solving skills (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 3*). It should also be stated that literacy be recognized as something that is evident or *not* evident, but can be viewed as a continuum of ability divided into leveled achievements of skill within a framework comprised of prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels ,4*). The scale formulated by the National Literacy Act encompasses five different levels, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 being the highest. Using this scale, the National Adult Literacy Survey mandated by Congress in 1988 generated findings that a total of 40-44 million of the 191 million American adults at that time to be near or at Level 1 on the literacy scale (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels ,4*). These findings show that although these adults could function many simple tasks, they lacked the skills necessary for more extensive functioning in daily life (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 4*) . This lack directly affects this groups' standard of living overall. Research has shown that approximately 43% of adults at Reading Level 1 are currently living within poverty, and the likelihood of being on some sort of public assistance welfare increases as the literacy rate goes down (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 5*). The income of those with a low

literacy rate is at an average of \$240.00 per week as compared to those at Level 5 who earn an average of \$681.00 per week (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels*, 5). The Employment Status of adults in Level 1 is generally low, with an average of nineteen income generating weeks per year, while those of higher Levels usually acquire an average of forty-four weeks, paid leave times not included (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels*, 5). Most distressing is the fact that crime is prevalent with those of lower literacy levels with seven out of ten prisoners finding themselves within those ratings (*The State of Literacy in America : Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels*, 5). Without adequate literacy skills, these persons lack the social, economical and educational options that are available to improve their quality of life and personal development, and this has become a more serious problem in recent years due to the change in the demand for skilled workers trained in ways that requires a higher level of literacy. More brain-power in hirelings is now warranted in this technological age, and the need for hard physical labor is in serious decline, therefore the skills acquired in scholastic years has come under more serious scrutiny. With the lowered earnings from a potentially large and growing group of low performing and low literacy citizens, the U.S. economy will become threatened by the lack of value reinvested within the stock market, Social Security and retirement arrangements (*Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4-12*, 7). This will affect not only those who depend on the health of the U.S. economy to sustain and provide resources for those in impoverished situations (of whom Levels 1 and 2 make up a great deal), it will put at risk high earning professionals during their retirement years when the nation's coffers have been depleted to fortify the existence of the poor (*Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4-12*, 7). With these ominous pronouncements, it is no wonder that raising the literacy achievement levels

across the board has become a strong focus for those in national office, for if it is not addressed the economic, political and social stability of the nation will be in jeopardy (*Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4-12, 7*). Therefore, it should be no wonder why there exists in our national psyche a growing panic about state of literacy in our children and their impending responsibility to sustain our nation's vitality.

Therein lays the increased pressure in public and private schools to generate the proletariat for a productive future workforce. Recent years have shown the public's focused attention on the literacy of students in our schools on a national level. With the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Race to the Top Program of 2009, the American government has echoed the concerns of its constituents based on standardized testing scores and the preparedness of graduates for future employment. With these new rules and catalysts geared toward changing these trends some progress has been made though they also come with some serious flaws. Although more accountability has been directed to those directly involved with the education of the students, there has generally been a serious lack of sufficient resources to finance the desired result (*Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4-12, 7*).

Correspondingly, wealthier school districts are forced to acknowledge and address the discrepancies among sub-groups within their lower achieving population that are evident in state standardized tests, but this has also brought about a less substantial method of teaching when efforts are made to teach to bad tests due to timing and pacing constraints (*Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4-12, 7*). Whereas there exists no simple answer to solving the problem of effectively teaching literacy within the schools, we can say that in recent years there has been a focused realignment in what being highly literate is and why it is necessary to achieve this for all in our society.

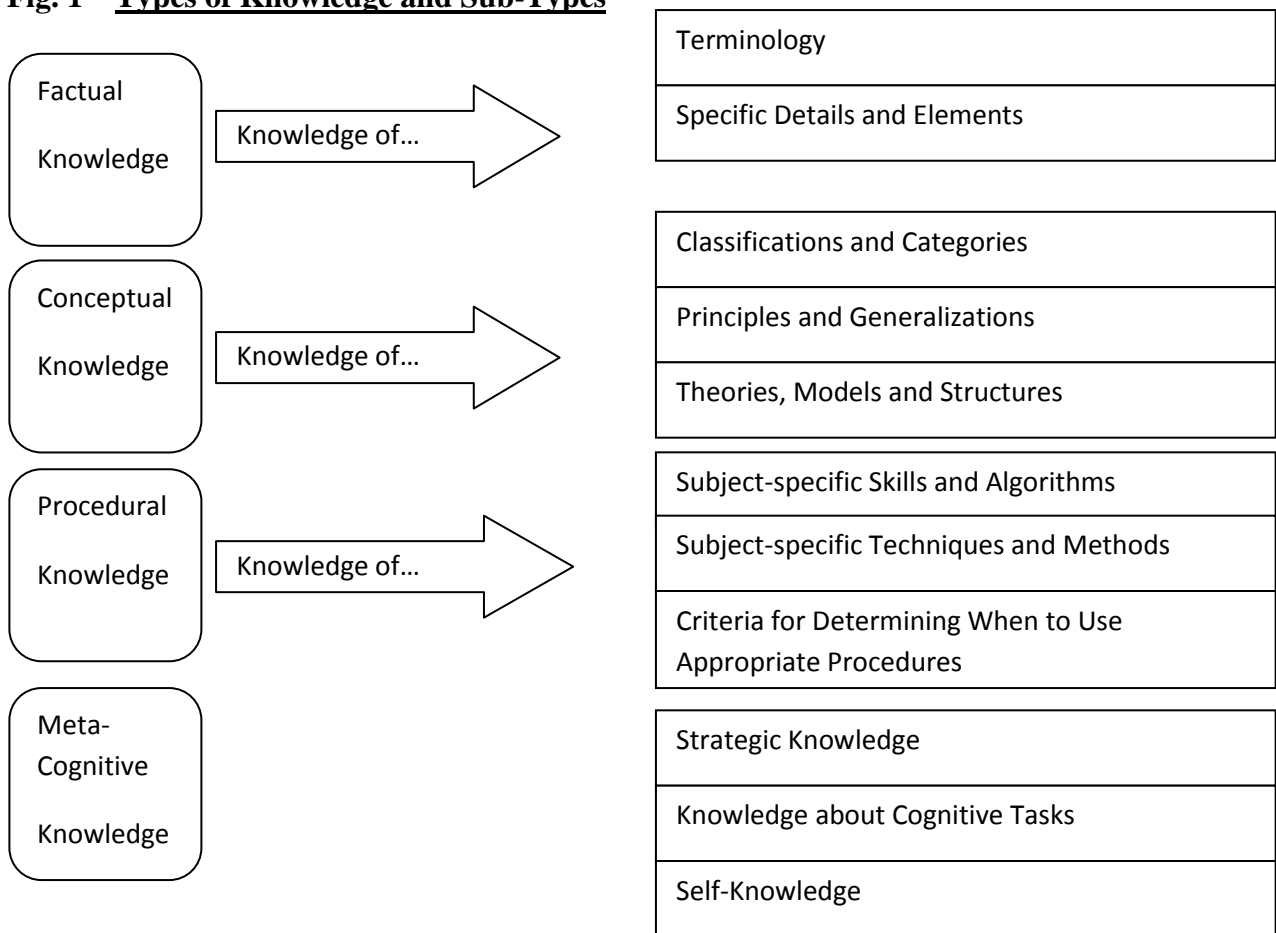
Positive Trends in Teaching for Literacy

The case for achieving a high state of literacy being established, it is now time to reflect on the commendatory methods and trends that are evident within school programs today. Ask any teacher of Language Arts and they will tell you that one of the best practices of teaching is to make the learning relevant to the student. Happily, this goes hand in hand with the new mandates of yet another national movement named the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Stated simply, the Common Core is a way to measure concurrency of learning as students move through their years of education in math and English language arts. Its purpose is to generate students properly prepared for collegiate studies, or to enter into the modern workforce. Despite various issues that make the Common Core movement one that is fraught with controversy and contretemps, we will focus on the well-meaning aims and objectives housed within this crusade which includes the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Process Dimension and the Knowledge Dimension. In fully comprehending the Cognitive Process, we can ensure that our students can perform the action verbs exemplifying their own synthesis of understanding (*A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing : A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 27). Through this process the student becomes a more competent and creative problem solver with developed analytical and evaluative skills. This is essential for students to achieve in order to become strong in literacy and to promote the ability to draw logical conclusions from presented information and to construct the cause and effect processing in thinking (*A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing : A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 27). The Knowledge Dimension is simply a way to compartmentalize the mode of knowledge that is being learned by the student. The different type of knowledge, factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive help to determine what the

Cognitive Process is accomplishing in action form (*A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing : A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, 27*).

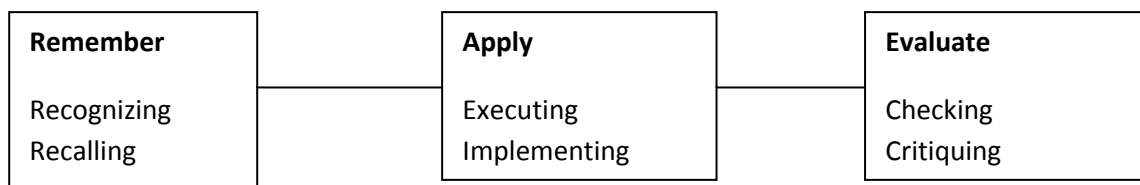
In the classroom, what this process usually resembles is the encouragement of critical thinking analysis and logic based reasoning to support understanding. The student is cultivated to foster new levels of literacy that is not only reaching the basic levels, but reaches levels higher order thinking.

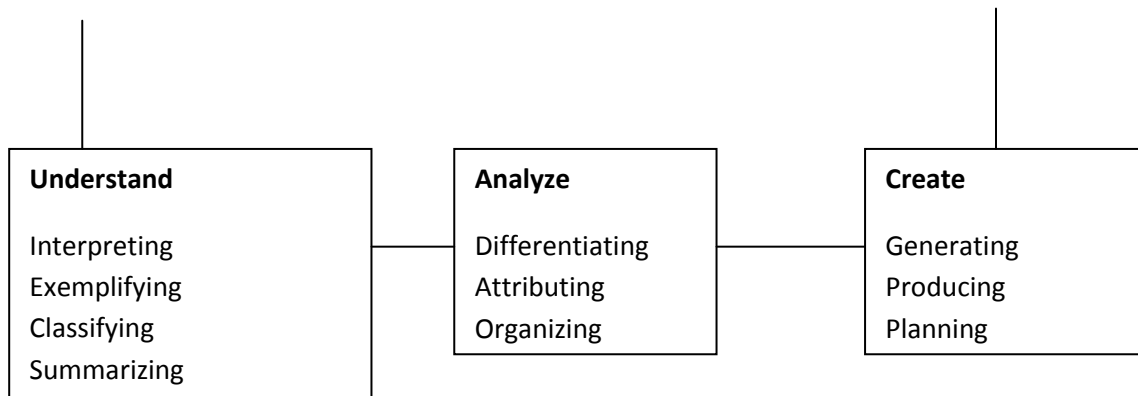
Fig. 1 Types of Knowledge and Sub-Types



From Anderson, Lorin and David Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing*. New York: Longman, 2001

Fig. 2 Cognitive Process





From Anderson, Lorin and David Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing*. New York: Longman, 2001

The Middle School Student

The educational needs of students differ greatly according to their years, but for the sake of argument we will focus our attention on the middle years student. In many ways, this age group represents the best and most challenging aspects of the younger and older age groups: they are unique in that sense. Because of this, it can be helpful to understand their singular sense of psyche. The middle years student is beginning their path in constructing their own identities and developing their relationship with their peers, family members and their place in the world (Willis, 20). Consequently, these students have also begun to formulate their own opinions on various school subjects, which are sometimes negative due to the unfortunate uninspired trend of some teachers to fall into ruts of rote learning, drills and workbooks (Willis, 20). Although these methods do have their place in education, they mostly generate the lower orders of thinking, knowledge and comprehension (Willis, 20). Of course, this severely lowers interest and engagement. Real world application and contextual learning provide more of a desired result by stimulating a higher cognitive level of analysis, evaluation and synthesis (Willis, 21). Teaching literacy alongside real world applications provides relevance for the middle years student, which,

to the students at this age, is of extreme importance. Encouraging exploration within the breadth of a topic feeds cognitive creativity which is also a facet of the literacy definition (Willis, 21).

If we stop to ponder the rationale of utilizing real world application in education, we can assert that the conceptualization is one we recognize and is effective. In elementary years, the learning in the classroom is done with an interdisciplinary approach, yet upon reaching middle school our learning greatly changes and becomes fragmented. Connections between the subjects become lost and solid literacy skills become an assumed student attribute. The acquisition, comprehension and production of language, both oral and written, are crucial for learning content knowledge. Unfortunately, it is forgotten that literacy has a continuum of definitions, and can have varied levels of fruition. Because we no longer simply need to produce future proletariat with basic literacy, the usual standards no longer apply. Higher order thinking and the ability to problem solve and analyze is required. Our methodology of teaching should be reconstructed to resemble current demands.

Using a Student Centered Approach

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence has created a useful framework upon which integrative teaching can be implemented. Within this framework are housed five standards that support effective instruction and best practices in teaching (Timar, 101) These standards are in reality a compendium of similar strategies and extensive research projects based in K-12 education between 1996-2003 (Timar, 101).

The Five Standards

- Joint Productive Activity : Teachers and Students Producing Together
- Language Development: Developing Language and Literacy Across the Curriculum

- Contextualization: Connecting Meaning to Students' Lives
- Challenging Activities: Teaching Complex Thinking
- Instructional Conversations: Teaching Through Conversation

(Timar, 101)

Now let us put this into context. If we understand that students comprehend text when it correlates to their own identity (interests, relationships and experiences), the student will in turn value the knowledge being taught and give effort and show ownership as they recognize relevance. In turn, the teacher can manipulate and shape the method and manner of instruction to the student's areas of challenge and background aiding the student in the process of making connections through a given task (Timar, 101). It is the learner centered classroom that is effective in promoting gains in literacy due to the fact that it builds upon the student's prior knowledge and experiences (Timar, 102). Research has shown that the emphasis on student-centered learning is the supporting framework for positive student engagement and motivation along with the development of "positive academic identities" (Timar, 103). Consequently, the teacher in these classrooms takes on the role of the advisor, facilitator or guide allowing the student more freedom in their education (Timar, 103). Facilitating collaborative and cooperative learning techniques accelerates gains in student achievement along with peer reflection and peer tutoring groups (Timar, 104). With the aid of their peers, English Language Learners and all Levels of literate ability find gains with their level of comprehension and logical analysis of any text.

Using Relevant Literature

In this part of the essay, we will regulate ourselves to the English classroom where the main focus is reading and writing--the two main points within literacy. If becoming a fluent reader and writer represents the desired objective, how can we achieve this often difficult task?

Because we have established the necessity of creating a student-centered classroom, it can probably go without saying that the literature used in the classroom should have relevancy. The middle school student is often a being who, being in the state of flux with shaping their identity, would appreciate a text that reflects similar experiences, and that echoes the same challenges as well. It can be argued that the classical literature choices are tried and true for any various numbers of reasons, but it has to be acknowledged that in today's times all the past methods have been tried and have been now found lacking. Change is necessary. That is not to say that the classical literature should be done away with by any means, it is just that these examples of literature may be above the ability of the lower levels of literacy since basic levels only deal with comprehension of simple text. It is not a good starting point for most middle school students: we can save that drudgery for later. For now, it is important to "hook" them into a love and appreciation for reading that is based upon a subject that all the students in this age group love to pay attention to, and that is their own ever-changing development (Willis, 20).

It should also be stated that the Lexile level of any used text should be within the grasp of the group of students. Using a text that is above the skill level of the student is counterproductive and will only generate frustration and lack of engagement, hence my reasoning for using the texts in the accompanying curriculum *We Beat the Streets* by Sharon Draper being at 860L and *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros at 870L. These scores are commonly acknowledged as being non-threatening to a reading-reluctant middle school student.

Memoir as a Method for Teaching Literacy

Using the memoir writing process for teaching literacy is a natural fit to the middle years age group and the relevancy of real-world application. The reasoning is two-fold: it can generate engagement with the student as they process their own identity and their place in the world and it facilitates higher order thinking and self-analysis as they beget a student-created product.

But what exactly is memoir? Is it more than just recounting events that occurred in one's life? Or is it more? Poet and essayist Katherine Bomer recalls the definition of memoir made by Philippe Lejeune in his own words: "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (Bomer, 4). At a time when self-analysis and self-reflection becomes their foremost interest, middle school students bloom at the chance to *find* their story in the process of *telling* their own story. This is achievable at all levels of literacy within the classroom, and can be started as a mechanism to promote writing and literacy growth. Whenever a student begins in the process of writing their memoir, it directly places within their hands all the power of the storyteller. They can self-direct the current the story follows as they swim along the tides of their own memories and they can shape their understanding of themselves as they analyze their words and experiences to define meaning. This process in itself echoes the goals of the Common Core mission statement and is giving voice to student-centered teaching at a most epic level. On a more personal level, the memoir writing process gives the student a voice, and helps them to determine their own identity for themselves (Bomer, 12). It also helps frame a context for understanding and exploring things that has confused them before, and provides a safe haven for using their language in the voice that they use to be understood, i.e., culturally or ethnically driven.

Purpose and Rationale

Behind all the jargon and statistics mentioned in the previous pages, there exists a veteran teacher who has a reason for creating such a work as her Final Project within the MALS program. Too often as a teacher I have witnessed the failure of a school system that is severely locked into a strict regimen of bureaucracy and political red tape. This is truly unfortunate. As we have become locked in senseless arguments about how to best educate our children, time has passed without recognition of the simplest fact that students learn best when given the opportunity to learn in their own way. Meanwhile, students are being passed along, according to the mandates that have been handed down by those least connected to these children's lives. The cycle continues. And the new school year begins with a new fresh batch of minds that, unfortunately, may be discouraged by our unfulfilling product—a shallow education.

Perhaps I sound a tad bitter. I am. Nevertheless, I became rejuvenated by my experience within the MALS program when I was encouraged to practice a method of education that I believe in: a chance to explore my interests. Being given the chance to investigate the topics and subjects that I found to be of deep interest, I journeyed through a path of self-discovery that validated both my love for learning new things and my philosophy that encourages an interdisciplinary education. When we learn about our world in context, we not only learn about those specific subjects, we also learn about life, and isn't that really the point? Being validated as a being capable of participating in my own education has instilled within me the knowledge that my voice and opinion should be heard and is worth merit. In education, too often our students have lost the chance to have that same freedom and with this curriculum I attempt to return to them—that crucial opportunity. Self-esteem and self-discovery is such a large part of growing up

into a confident, productive adult. Incorporating an opportunity for self-analysis and the celebration of self is a meaningful way for our kids to learn.

Conclusion

Using memoir in an interdisciplinary approach to promote literacy is an innovative method to change education in a positive way. There do exist other strategies to champion literacy, but I feel that using memoir is a way to address the literacy challenges for the middle years student. Though the Common Core program that is a national movement may have its flaws and imperfections, the general mission focus is relevant and clear when it comes to helping along our education system. Within its framework, we can assess if we are reaching all children and find new ways to help those who fall between the cracks. Interdisciplinary teaching gives our children an integrative approach to learning that becomes necessary for application in real world situations. With those skills, our students can become successful and productive citizens, and holistic products of the 21st Century Initiative.

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