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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1988 Volume III: Autobiography in America

Autobiography: Everyone Has a Story to Tell

Guide for Curriculum Unit 88.03.02
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My main objective in this unit is to enable children to write freely about themselves. This unit also exposes students to a sampling of books written for, by, or about children. Although I had middle school learning center pupils in mind when I developed this unit, the strategies and lessons can be easily adapted for any classroom situation—there is certainly much room for individual differences. This unit stresses three fundamental skills: reading, writing, and improving one’s self-image.

I begin to get to know each pupil as a personal client and thus conduct an interview. This leads into journal writing which then leads into relating to others through the selected readings. I explain autobiography as more than just a true story told in the first person point of view; action is but a small part. Instead, I get students to focus on a character’s reactions, which I truly believe is the heart of autobiography.

I try desperately to rid students of the idea that they are really nobody. Too often students feel that their lives are meaningless without soap opera excitement. I discuss feedback techniques which help students to get comfortable with who they really are, as plain or complicated as they might feel. Finally, this unit is designed to bring forth the fact to students that indeed they, too, have a story to tell.

(Recommended for Language Arts classes, grades 5-8)

Key Words

Autobiography Writing Instruction

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