



## Narrative Voice: What is Real? What is True? What is Reliable?

Curriculum Unit 08.02.07  
by Ruth Chaffee

“But Charlotte,” said Wilbur, “I’m *not* terrific.”  
“That doesn’t make a particle of difference,” replied Charlotte. “Not a particle. People believe almost anything they see in print” (E.B. White 89).

### Introduction

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As Charlotte articulates in *Charlotte’s Web*, people maintain an astonishing level of trust in what they read. One of the most important skills in life is to be able to evaluate the truthfulness of voice, whether in a text, online, or face-to-face. We all do this constantly in our everyday lives when we read the news, meet a new person, or shop for a car. We are incessantly determining whether the source of information we encounter is trustworthy. In the digital era, this issue has become increasingly complicated for students, who have only known life in which information is shared more quickly and freely than ever before. With more information continuously available at our fingertips, the skill of discernment becomes even more necessary.

The goal of this curricular unit is to address this skill of evaluating the truthfulness and reliability in voice-in both traditional texts and contemporary digital narratives. Whether through crafted objectivity, reliable commentary, or vivid realism, the reader of a text is persuaded to accept the narrative. Certain qualities of voice, such as direct comments by the narrator or an impersonal narration, can undermine this meticulously constructed plausibility (Booth 346). Booth argues in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, “most seeming facts carry, in fiction, a heavy load of evaluation” (177). In this unit, the narrative voice is the focus point in the critical analysis of the author’s craft. Students must be able to determine whether the voice of a text, fiction or non-fiction, has a convincing and realistic texture.

This three-week unit is specifically designed for tenth grade students in a high school special education resource room. Through the novel *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, other readings, activities, discussions, and

writing, students will develop critical reading skills, and will analyze and evaluate the reliability of the narrator or voice of various texts. The unit will explore issues of reliability of the narrative voice and characteristics of different genres, as well as real-world and digital narratives.

There are 10 tenth grade students in my current classroom, with disabilities including specific learning disabilities, organization/attention deficits, speech/language disorders, and hearing impairment. These disabilities manifest themselves in different ways on the individual level. Several of my students have auditory processing deficits, making comprehension of instruction difficult. Their reading levels are all below grade level, ranging from a third grade level to a seventh grade level. Some are just beginning to feel comfortable participating in class discussion, while others can hardly stop talking to sit still. Many of them also have working memory issues, which necessitate repetition of instruction and a slow pace. As a result of their disabilities, many of my students have difficulty engaging fully with much of the written text that is presented in their coursework.

The resource room is established as a separate class, which my students have once daily. While students are given some time to complete assignments from other classes, the essential purpose of the class is to function as academic support for the students' specific needs, rather than as a study hall. That said, there are regular occasions when I work with students individually or in small groups to clarify assignments or review a recently taught skill. Central to all of my work is facilitating student success in the regular curriculum and their growth overall as students.

This unit is designed in accordance with the function of the resource room to support student work in regular education coursework, as well as to target specific needed areas. Within that goal, the unit I am designing will integrate directly with the English curriculum. While the unit will build on my students' observed need for critical reading and evaluation skills, it is also designed to scaffold the regular education unit on the novel *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers. Using multiple texts and incorporating the use of the novel, *Monster*, from the general curriculum, this unit will directly support my students' educational needs.

## Unit Objectives

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At the conclusion of this unit, the resource students will:

- Identify the correct genre for a text.
- Analyze a text/narrative voice for reliability and truthfulness.
- Analyze real-world texts/digital sites for reliability and truthfulness.
- Support analytical claims with two concrete details.
- Evaluate sources to determine which are reliable and appropriate for use in a research paper.

## **Preparing for Transition: Real-World Skills**

In addition to these goals, the unit also addresses real-world evaluation skills. In the realm of special education, once a student reaches the age of 15, planning begins for the transition from high school to life after high school. While students will be working towards different goals-4-year colleges, 2-year colleges, community college, trade school, jobs, or sheltered employment-they all need support in developing their practical real-life skills. In addition to this unit's focus on evaluating voice in literary texts, students will analyze real-world texts and digital situations. Evaluating voice for truthfulness is a practical skill that will serve students in the real world. As students move from the support of their families towards independent living, they will continuously have to make these decisions on their own. Some of my students are particularly susceptible to having someone take advantage of their vulnerabilities. This unit will improve their skills at evaluation and discernment to address this weakness.

## **Reading and Responding**

Another objective of the unit is to improve students' abilities to write analytically. All of my students have difficulties expressing themselves through writing. When asked to write about a text, my students respond with a surface recounting of the basic plot details. Even when told specifically to avoid plot summaries, they are unable to write critically independently. This level of plot response does not indicate the critical thinking that educators must cultivate in students. Through the practice and discussion of this unit, students will develop an understanding of critical analysis of the author's craft and the voice of the narrator.

## **Strategies**

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### **Structure**

As this is a unit designed for a resource classroom, there are several structural differences from a unit that would be designed for a regular education classroom. Resource class time is important in order to keep students abreast of the regular education curriculum. While there are core content objectives for the regular education disciplines, there are no set guidelines for the special education classroom. Instead, the focus of the resource classroom is to facilitate growth for the students in their areas of academic weakness. When longer writing assignments, exams, or projects are assigned in the regular education classroom, they are often scaffolded-broken down into shorter formative assignments to allow special education students to reach the same end point-in the resource room. The lessons of this unit will be designed to last only part of the Resource period daily, to allow support for the students' other regular education coursework.

In addition, the resource time period is often used for auxiliary special education services, such as social work or speech therapy. Thus, it is important that this unit be flexible to the ever-changing needs of the students. In response to that, lessons will generally be completed within one period, rather than stretching over multiple days. Although the lessons will naturally build upon one another, the students will best be able to keep abreast of the content if each lesson is a discrete, self-contained entity. This is also important because Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School is an arts magnet school and students are frequently attending field trips or rehearsals for performances.

Most of my students work at a slower than average pace due to processing disorders and working memory

issues. Because of this, the students are already struggling with the coursework from their regular education classes. This unit is designed to improve their critical thinking and analysis skills, but not to increase their workload significantly. As a result, students will not have any assignments to work on outside of the classroom. Students will be given short excerpts from books rather than being required to read the entire text, and all texts will be read aloud, with students having their own copies in order to track and annotate. The work within the classroom will be scaffolded individually for each student, but presented at an accessible instructional level.

Finally, this unit is designed to parallel a unit simultaneously occurring in the students' English course. In the resource classroom, students will be writing in response to journal prompts, completing activities, and discussing. While there will be a final project in which students can present their learning, the culmination of their learning in this unit will truly be reflected in their final paper for the parallel English unit.

### **Adaptations for the Regular Classroom**

Although this unit is designed to function in a special education setting, much of the material can be easily adapted for use in the regular education classroom. While the activities are designed to build upon each other sequentially, the lessons are also intended to be discrete entities and thus could and should be used in another unit or for a different student body. Suggestions for the regular education setting include: increased pace, more challenging texts, independent reading, and homework assignments.

### **Texts**

The unit will support the regular education classroom reading of the novel *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers. *Monster* is the story of a teenage boy from Harlem, Steve Harmon, who is on trial for participating in a fatal armed robbery of a convenience store. The novel addresses the story through Steve's first-person diary intertwined with third-person script-like sections of the trial. The writing structure places the reader as a member of the jury, not entirely sure of the main character's guilt or innocence. Throughout, the reader is presented with the court transcript of testimony, as well as the journal of the narrator, Steve. The reader must evaluate the information and come to an independent conclusion before the jury reveals their verdict.

*Monster* is a book that is typically taught in high schools because the content, the struggles of a working-class, urban, black, male teenager trying to succeed, allows for text-to-self connections. Themes of coming-of-age, prejudice, and friendships, allow for use of the book in different units. Because of its high-interest content, seventh grade reading level, and large font size, this book is accessible to students with a wide range of abilities.

In addition to *Monster*, the unit will employ short excerpts from various texts. Short selections are chosen so that they can be read aloud and analyzed within a partial class period. Having shorter selections also allows for the use of increased variety of texts analyzed. Suggested texts are listed below and include samples from various genres, including high school classics such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Catcher in the Rye*, and less traditional texts such as David Eggers' fictionalized autobiography of a Lost Boy of Sudan, *What is the What*.

### **Activities**

Throughout the unit, the first 10 minutes of class will be spent reading the novel *Monster* aloud. Although the novel is at a seventh grade reading level, making it more accessible, giving students repeated exposure to the

content allows them to engage with the material on a deeper level. For those students with lower reading levels, it prepares them to participate in class discussions and assignments.

### *Two Truths and a Lie*

In order to start the students thinking about evaluating another's voice, the class will play the game, "Two Truths and a Lie." This game is a classic icebreaker game that relies upon the audience's ability to discern between fact and fiction. Each student will be required to create two personal truths and develop one lie. The goal of the activity is to determine which of the three statements is an untruth. Although the students know each other from school, they know very little about each other's outside lives. This activity will serve the dual purpose of improving the group cohesion and trust, and stimulating them to start thinking about the qualities that make a statement believable.

Following the activity, students will be asked to write a journal prompt responding to and evaluating the activity. Students will have ten minutes to answer the following questions: What made you choose one statement as a lie over another? Was it easy/tricky to determine the truths among the three statements? Which statements were easy to pick out as lies and why? Was it difficult for you to lie convincingly? After the journal prompt, I will have students share their responses, leading to a general discussion of the characteristics of true and false statements. As a result of this activity, students will develop a series of questions they would ask themselves to evaluate the truthfulness of a statement. Some examples of possible questions developed include: Did the person seem sure when saying the statement? What is the purpose of saying this statement? Are you trying to trick your classmates? Does the statement seem plausible/realistic? Did the person include details? If students are unable to fully develop the questions after the first session of Two Truths and a Lie, we will play the game again. The questions the students develop will be the foundation for the application of evaluation skills to texts later in the unit. The guiding questions they develop will be posted onto the board and revised throughout the unit to reflect changing student discernment.

### *Dictionary Game*

Another activity for early on in the unit, while students are still learning to evaluate the reliability of voice, is the game Dictionary. This game is commercially packaged as Balderdash, but can simply be played with a dictionary. The person whose turn it is selects a word from the dictionary. That person queries the group to determine whether anyone already knows the definition. If nobody is familiar with the word, each person is required to develop his or her own, false, definition. Those definitions as well as the correct definition are written down on slips of paper. The leader reads aloud all of the choices and the other participants must vote for the one they believe to be correct. A participant earns one point for selecting the correct definition and also earns one point for each person who chooses his or her definition as the correct one.

After each student has a chance to select the word from the dictionary, students will respond to the activity with the following journal prompt: Do you use the same rules/questions in the Dictionary Game as Two Truths and a Lie to determine true and false? Explain. The game, writing prompt, and discussion will increase students' vocabularies and will expose them to the fact that different voices are reliable in different contexts. In order to write a convincing dictionary definition, one must write in the formal tone and with the structure typically employed in dictionary definitions. Without these critical characteristics, participants are unlikely to trust that definition. Structure, and its crucial role in establishing validity, is introduced through this activity. Later in the unit the importance of structure will be revisited when we address phishing, the e-mail scam. Following the writing prompt, the class will determine if the guiding questions need to be amended to fully address the issue of truth in the context of the Dictionary Game. Any changes or additions to the guiding

questions will be posted on the board for student reference.

### *Text Analysis*

After the introductory discussion and lead-in activities surrounding truthfulness, during which students develop their own guiding analysis questions, the unit will continue with a basic exploration of literary genres. Genre is a common topic for English or Language Arts curriculum, but is an important place to start in the analysis of the reliability of texts. Students will identify their preconceived notions of the truthfulness of each genre: non-fiction, fiction, biography, autobiography, tall-tale, etc., specifically focusing on the quality of the narrative voice. Students have previously learned about genre, but this review session will reengage them with the topic within a critical literacy context.

One of the most interesting books to talk about in this discussion is James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* . Chosen in 2003 as Amazon.com's editor's favorite book and then in September 2005 for Oprah Winfrey's Book of the Month, this memoir of drug and alcohol addiction received rave reviews. Soon afterwards, Smoking Gun website produced an article criticizing the book for untrue embellishments (The Smoking Gun). One of the main critiques was that Frey spent only a few hours in jail, rather than 87 days, as the book claimed. What does it mean to include several "lies" within a greater work of "truth"? Is it still valuable as a work of fiction? Can the book still be considered a non-fiction piece? It is still considered as such by the New Haven Public Library. In the first few pages, Frey's vivid language, replete with grisly details of his withdrawal from alcohol, make *A Million Little Pieces* a particularly powerful book to read aloud. After several pages, I will query the students for their first impressions of the book, as well as hypotheses of the genre. I will then provide the background information to the book, including accolades received, selections from The Smoking Gun article, and the specific inconsistencies with Frey's life experiences. As a practice in analysis, students will evaluate the genre of Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* , providing evidence to support the assertion.

Throughout the unit, students will be exposed to text samples from different literary genres. For each sample, a short selection will be read aloud and students will have their own copy of the text excerpt from which to follow along. After each reading, students will identify the genre of the text and write a paragraph evaluating the reliability of the voice. I will provide students with a graphic organizer to help them organize their concrete details and to support them in determining whether the text is or is not reliable (Appendix A).

The English department at Cooperative Arts and Humanities has been teaching the students the Schaeffer paragraph model of writing. This model embodies the following structure: topic sentence, concrete detail, commentary, commentary, concrete detail, commentary, commentary, and concluding sentence. Requiring students to provide evidence to support their answer is practice for a skill they must employ in all their academic writing, as well as on the standardized CAPT. As practice and as a method of developing their writing and critical literacy, students will write paragraphs evaluating the text using the Schaeffer paragraph model. The following topic sentence will be given, as well as a graphic organizer delineating all of the required components of a Schaeffer paragraph: "(Name of text) does/does not have a reliable voice." At this point in the unit, students will begin to apply the guiding questions that they developed during the Dictionary Game and Two Truths and a Lie. For each text, they will ask themselves the guiding questions and provide evidence from the text selection to support their answers.

Examples of possible texts include:

· Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* , page 1

In the first page of this novel, Huck introduces himself as the narrator. He says, “You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,’ but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth...” (Twain 1). This text would be an interesting beginning text for the students to start evaluating, because Huck outright admits that people lie.

- Walter Dean Myers, *Monster* , pages 137-148

This is the text the students will be reading for English class. In this selection, Steve reveals that he thinks his prosecutor and his mother believe him to be guilty. He also claims “ I didn’t kill Mr. Nesbitt” (Myers 140).

- Dave Eggers, *What is the What* , Title page and preface, pages 4 & 6

This text is a difficult one to interpret. On the title page, the book is identified as a novel and as an autobiography. During the preface, the subject of the autobiography, Valentino Achak Deng, writes “I told my story orally to the author. He then concocted this novel, approximating my own voice...because many of the passages are fictional, the result is called a novel” (Eggers 6). This text will be analyzed later in the unit. I will particularly focus upon the issue of personal truth vs. collective truth.

- J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*

Holden Caulfield is the quintessential unreliable narrator. His commentary is full of hyperbole and contradiction. Almost any page of this text would be appropriate.

- James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces* , pages 6-11

This novel/autobiography won acclaim from Oprah Winfrey, only to be discovered later as fraudulent. It is still filed under the non-fiction section at the New Haven Public Library. In this beginning section, the narrator describes his drug and alcohol abuse and his symptoms. “What time do you start drinking? When I wake up. She marks it down. How much per day? As much as I can” (Frey 9). Can you trust someone who has just admitted to drinking as much as they can? What qualities make someone untrustworthy?

- Encyclopedia article

- Any biography, preferably of a high-interest subject

- Autobiography, preferably of a high-interest subject

- Tall tale, or some other fable with outrageous claims

This activity can be repeated with numerous works of literature from all genres, increasing student exposure to different texts. As an adaptation, the title and cover of the book can be removed to eliminate the visual clues to genre.

Concurrent with this activity is a discussion of what we learn as readers, from a close reading of an excerpt. How do we know that a text is fiction or non-fiction? How does the narrative voice differ from non-fiction to fiction? What happens when these fiction/non-fiction lines are blurred, as they often are in books and online? What do we learn about the narrator? Using Bloom's Taxonomy, these questions stimulate higher order thinking within the students. This discussion will be teacher-led, particularly in the analysis of the first few texts, but will subsequently become student-led as the students become defter at extracting supporting details from the text. Decreasing teacher guidance is an appropriate scaffold for students who are struggling with the activity or having difficulty finding concrete details within the text to support their claims.

In addition to the Schaeffer paragraphs, students will be asked to write journal responses following many class activities. Their journals are provided by the teacher every year and are a record of the work they complete in the class. They contain a vocabulary section and students regularly answer writing prompts in them throughout the year. The expectations for the journal prompt responses include a length of at least five sentences, complete sentences with capitalization and ending punctuation, and proper mechanics and punctuation. After writing each journal prompt, students will be asked to share their answers, but only to read exactly what they have written. There are two reasons for doing this. First, many of my students are successful at discussion, but have difficulty communicating their thoughts through writing, an essential skill for academic success. If students are required to read only what they have written, they will be encouraged to communicate their ideas through writing.

Secondly, the students have the habit of writing quickly without thought and not reviewing their own work. Reading written work aloud, it is easier to hear the awkward phrasing, the incorrect grammar, incomplete sentences, or missing words. The class has been working daily on oral language, grammar, and punctuation revisions to give them more practice editing. Sharing their work aloud and recognizing errors are steps towards students becoming comfortable engaging in the writing process of editing and revision.

Incorporated into the discussion of the narrative voice will be a discussion of perspective and voice in real-world situations. In addition to creating a curriculum unit that will engage students in thinking about literature, this unit will provide a broader context with which to discern fact from fiction and reliability. Many of my students seem to have limited exposure to and understanding of aspects of life out of their own realm. How can this be the when they live in such an interconnected global world of continuously streaming information? How do we know whether we can trust someone's voice, whether it is a narrator, doctor, mechanic, or salesman? In order to complement the analysis of literary texts, the unit will also include real-world texts, such as advertisements and e-mails, which must be assessed for reliability on the practical day-to-day level.

In this vein students will explore advertisements, and fictional and non-fictional narratives online. Advertisements from newspapers and magazines, read critically, will reveal intentional deception. Real-estate advertisements should be dissected for the biased language. How can a decrepit shack be described as a "cozy, fixer-upper?" It is important for the students to be aware of the intention of these documents and to begin to see through the unreliable language.

## **Digital Natives**

Technology allows for previously unimaginable connections between people around the world, or within the



same classroom. At the same time, this influx of information barraging the students requires even more skills to discern fact from fiction. As Marc Prensky argues in his article, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," "as a result of this ubiquitous environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today's students *think and process information fundamentally differently* from their predecessors" (Prensky 1). Prensky believes that as teachers, we should adapt to this new "digital native" student and provide information in new media forms. Judith Elkin argues that electronic books and other new forms of literature should be incorporated into a modern idea of literacy (Elkin 157). In keeping with this idea, this unit will explore two main technological texts, Myspace and Wikipedia. While assessing the truth or reliability of voice, it would be incomplete not to address modern digital texts that the students are faced with everyday.

### *Myspace*

This social-networking site developed in the late nineties and has exploded into the mainstream. There are currently over 110 million active monthly users (Stelter 1). It has become a portal to the web with Myspacetv.com, celebrity Myspace, and separate sections within the sites for comedians, filmmakers, and band members, all hoping to be discovered by a major label. For people under age 30, and certainly under age 20, having a Myspace page is commonplace. Over half of my students have their own Myspace websites and spend numerous hours each day on this site.

Culturally, it has become an interesting space. On the website, the lines are blurred between fact and fiction. Browsing through the websites it at times impossible to distinguish between true self-depictions and less authentic portrayals. The unique situation of Myspace, that it is at once privately anonymous and yet also extremely public, further obscures its reliability. The Terms and Conditions require that users be of at least 14 years of age and that registration information be truthful and accurate. Users may not misrepresent themselves as under age 18. Although there is a list of inappropriate content to post, "MySpace assumes no responsibility for monitoring the MySpace Services for inappropriate content or conduct" ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)). Users are free to set up their own webpage, posting pictures, comments, and selecting their top eight friends. There are no requirements to be truthful. How then, do you know what to trust? What are the dangers intrinsic to this website?

If this website is blocked on the school server, I will use the "capture screen" option to create a PowerPoint slideshow of various Myspace webpages. Students will then make a list of what types of information people display on their webpages and compare and contrast that with their own webpages. Students will be asked to respond with a journal prompt: What information do you display on your webpage? What are some of the vulnerabilities? Do you tell the truth on your own Myspace/Facebook pages? When do you present yourself totally truthfully? When do you choose to embellish or withhold information? Do you consider this lying? I will ask students to explain the choices behind their Myspace webpages, particularly relating to this issue of authentic portrayal. The previously developed guiding questions will also be applied in the discussion of Myspace.

### *Wikipedia*

At Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School, each senior must complete a research paper that incorporates his or her artistic major as part of graduation requirements. Students were outraged when they were told that Wikipedia had been banned from the list of acceptable sources. The English version of Wikipedia has over 2.3 million articles and there are ten language-specific different Wikipedia websites ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)). Still, the students don't understand that Wikipedia is an open-source reference tool. This unit will discuss basic principles of the website and how it functions. Using a digital projector, I will enter a

Wikipedia article and change the information right in front of the students. Students will then respond to the following journal prompt: What are some of the advantages and dangers of Wikipedia? Can you trust information from the site? Is it more or less reliable than Encyclopedia Britannica?

### *Phishing*

Phishing is a dangerous scam perpetrated through e-mail to retrieve personal information and financial data, such as credit card and bank account numbers. These scams have become so widespread that Microsoft even publishes a guide to recognizing these dangers

(<http://www.microsoft.com/protect/yourself/phishing/identify.msp>). Although many of my students do not even hold bank accounts yet, they would be very susceptible to these techniques in the future. Students will examine an example of phishing, analyzing the typical features that are associated with fraudulent inquiries, and the characteristics that convey reliability. A complete lesson plan involving phishing is included later in the unit.

### *StoryCorps*

StoryCorps, founded by David Isay in 2003, is an effort to record people talking with someone important to them. As the website states, "By recording the stories of our lives with the people we care about, we experience our history, hopes, and humanity" ([www.storycorps.net](http://www.storycorps.net)). Since 2003, over tens of thousands of people have recorded their conversations each day. These conversations are recorded onto CD as a permanent record from the participants and one conversation a week is compiled into a short segment and aired on National Public Radio. These produced conversations have been compiled onto a CD entitled, "Listening is an Act of Love." As in Myspace, the semi-anonymous social-networking site, people participating in StoryCorps are not bound to tell the truth. I will play segments from "Listening is an Act of Love," and students will evaluate these audio texts using the same graphic organizer and guiding questions used earlier in the unit. Even though the stories may seem outrageous, such as an old African-American woman recounting having her nail ripped off by a white man for having nail polish during the 1950s, they still ring true. Why? Is there something valuable in communicating an experience, even if it might contain factual inaccuracies? How do people who have endured the unbelievable communicate their stories?

### **Final Project**

As the culmination of the mini-explorations into reliability and truthfulness in the narrator's voice, as well as in real-world texts, students will be asked to create a final project. According to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, students will have the flexibility to show their knowledge through a myriad of mediums (Gardner).

Students will be asked to work individually or in small groups to complete one in the following list of possible final projects:

1. Create a Wikipedia entry for Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School.
2. Create a Myspace webpage for Steve Harmon, the main character from *Monster*.
3. Following the StoryCorps model, record an interview between two people, editing it so that it was an interesting/cohesive story. Students could also pretend to be Steve Harmon and another character in the interview.
4. Write an online blog of Steve Harmon's trial (at least 10 entries).

5. Write a letter to the New Haven Public Library, explaining where they should catalog James Frey's book, *A Million Little Pieces* . Provide reasons and details.
6. Write a letter to the principal convincing her to allow students to use Wikipedia as a source for their senior research projects.
7. Create an advertisement for a junky product or a run-down building that makes the item sound wonderful.
8. Produce a brochure warning about phishing to distribute to the Cooperative Arts and Humanities community.

## Lesson Plans

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### Lesson 1

Grade: High School

Goal: To evaluate the reliability of the narrator's voice

Objectives:

1. Identify examples of when a narrator is being reliable or unreliable.
2. Write a paragraph with a topic sentence, concrete detail, and supporting commentary.

Standards: Language Arts Content Standard 1: Students will read and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative ways to literary, informational, and persuasive texts.

Materials:

Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*

Graphic Organizer (Appendix A)

## Procedure:

1. Begin lesson by reading *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers, aloud to students for 5-10 minutes, while they follow along in their own copies of the book.
2. Introduce the activity by discussing trust, how it's developed, and how it can be lost. "If your friend lied to you, you may not trust them the next time they tell you something. We have been discussing how you know when you can or cannot consider the voice of a book reliable, even from short selections of text."
3. Pass out a photocopy of the first page of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.
4. Read aloud the first page of the novel. In the first page of this novel, Huck introduces himself as the narrator. He says, "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth..." (Twain 1).
5. Distribute the graphic organizer (Appendix A) that provides students with a structure to find clues as to why he might be trustworthy and why not. Remind them of the guiding questions on truth and reliability derived from the prior activities of "Two Truths and a Lie" and "Dictionary."
6. Reread the text aloud, having them underline parts that make them believe in Huck and those that make them less sure of him. Complete the graphic organizer, including identifying the genre of the selection.
7. Using the data from the graphic organizer, students will create a Schaeffer paragraph analyzing the reliability of the narrator.
8. Students who feel comfortable sharing their paragraph can read them aloud to model their work to other students.

## Lesson 2

Grade: High School

Goal: Students will think critically about genres

Objectives:

1. Students will answer eight true/false questions about genres and reliability.
2. Students will justify their answers with a written sentence.
3. Students will share their answers and thoughts in a class discussion.

Standards: Content Standard 1: Students will read and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative ways to literary, informational and persuasive texts. A: describe the thoughts, opinions and questions that arise as they read, view, or listen to a text, demonstrate a basic understanding of the text, and identify inconsistencies and ambiguities

Materials:

Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*

Worksheet with the 8 true/false questions

Procedure:

- 1) Begin lesson by reading *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers, aloud to students for 5-10 minutes, while they follow along in their own copies of the book.
- 2) Distribute the eight true/false statements below.
  - a. Non-fiction is completely true. T/F
  - b. Fiction is completely false. T/F
  - c. A biography is always true. T/F
  - d. An autobiography is always true. T/F
  - e. When I tell a story, I always tell the exact truth. T/F
  - f. Everything on Myspace is true. T/F
  - g. Everything on my Myspace account is true. T/F
  - h. Wikipedia is a reliable source for a research paper. T/F

Read the statements aloud. Give students 10 minutes to complete the true/false statements.

- 3) Encourage them to spend time actually thinking about the statements. After each question, they need to write one sentence justifying why they thought it was true or false.  
Students will share their answers and we will discuss each statement. Promote discussion of
- 4) each statement by providing relevant text examples. Students earn points for participation in the discussion.

### Lesson 3

Grade: High School

Goal: To become familiar with online fraud schemes

Objectives:

- 1) Students will identify characteristics of phishing scams.
- 2) Students will read and respond with a paragraph of at least five complete sentences about the realistic qualities of phishing scams.

Standards: Content Standard 1: Students will read and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative

ways to literary, informational and persuasive texts. K: describe theme, symbolism, tone and other complex elements of fiction, and identify point of view, manipulative language and other elements of bias in nonfiction materials

Materials:

Copies of Microsoft’s “Recognize phishing scams and fraudulent e-mails” for each student.

<http://www.microsoft.com/protect/yourself/phishing/identify.msp>  
<http://www.microsoft.com/protect/yourself/phishing/identify.msp>

Journals

*Monster* , by Walter Dean Myers

Procedure:

- 1) Begin lesson by reading *Monster* , by Walter Dean Myers, aloud to students for 5-10 minutes, while they follow along in their own copies of the book.
- 2) Write the word “phishing” on the board and ask any student to pronounce it.
- 3) Ask if anyone has heard of that before. If anyone has, have them share what they know about it.
- 4) Distribute the Microsoft article. Read the Microsoft “Recognize phishing scams and fraudulent e-mails” article aloud.  
Write the following prompt on the board: Have you ever received a phishing e-mail? What information do the phishing e-mails try to extract? What would they do with that information? What characteristics do the e-mails include that make them seem legitimate?
- 5) Have students copy the prompt into their journals. When everyone has finished copying the prompt, ask the students to respond to the questions through writing for the next 10 minutes.
- 6) When finished, have students share their responses by reading exactly what they have written in their journals.

## Resources

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### Reading List for Students

Eggers, Dave. *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* . San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2006.

Frey, James. *A Million Little Pieces* . New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

Isay, David. *Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project* . Penguin Audio; Abridged edition (November 8, 2007)

Murray, Jaye. *Bottled Up*. New York: Puffin, 2004.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster: A Full-Cast Dramatization*. Dir. Charles Potter. Random House Audio Publishing Group, 2000.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.

"Myspace Terms & Conditions." Myspace.com. 28 Feb. 2008. 24 May 2008.

<http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.terms>.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951.

The Smoking Gun, *A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Addiction to Fiction*,

<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/jamesfrey/0104061jamesfrey1.html>. (3/18/2008).

Wikimedia Foundation. Wikipedia. 25 May 2008. [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).

## **Materials for Classroom Use**

Journals

Graphic Organizer (Appendix A)

Digital projector and computer with Internet access

CD player

Short excerpts of text from numerous sources

## **Annotated Bibliography**

Adams, Timothy Dow. *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Critical analysis of truth in narratives exploring the blurred line between fact and fiction in autobiographical works.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Classic text of criticism of fiction which examines the techniques authors use to persuade readers to accept what they are reading.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974. Critical exploration of constructed irony in fictional texts. Booth argues that direct irony in some ways suggests an unreliable narrator and cannot be taken at face value by readers.

Butler, Charles ed. *Teaching Children's Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Compilation on teaching children's fiction.

Eggers, Dave. *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*. San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2006. A fictionalized recounted autobiography of an actual Lost Boy of Sudan.

Elkin, Judith. "Teaching Children's Fiction." *Teaching Children's Fiction*. Ed. Charles Butler. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 152-171. Chapter within a compilation. Argues that students should be exposed to all forms of modern literacy, including digital forms.

Frey, James. *A Million Little Pieces*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005. Controversial memoir which explores drug abuse, alcoholism, and life low points that was found to have embellishments after topping the *New York Times* nonfiction list.

Isay, David. *Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project* . Penguin Audio; Abridged edition (November 8, 2007). Audio recording of interviews of everyday Americans about life and relationships from NPR's StoryCorps Project.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: Theory of Multiple Intelligences* . New York: Basic Books, 1993. Educational theory book that stresses that educators should recognize and value the various intelligences that we all possess in different distributions.

Literacy Department. *Grade 10 Language Arts Curriculum* . New Haven, CT: New Haven Public Schools, 2007-2008. Guide to the curriculum map to the standards addressed in New Haven Public Schools in English.

Microsoft. "Recognize phishing scams and fraudulent e-mails." Microsoft 12 Feb. 2008. 24 May 2008.

<http://www.microsoft.com/protect/yourself/phishing/identify.mspx>>. Web-based article describing the key characteristics of a phishing e-mail.

Murray, Jaye. *Bottled Up*. New York: Puffin, 2004. Fictional narrative of a wayward high school student dealing with a tumultuous home life with substance abuse.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster: A Full-Cast Dramatization*. Dir. Charles Potter. Random House Audio Publishing Group, 2000. Audio book of the novel *Monster* .

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. Teen novel about a young black male being in the wrong place at the wrong time and thus being charged for murder. Intersperses journaling with narrative requiring the reader to be the juror.

"Myspace Terms & Conditions." Myspace.com. 28 Feb. 2008. 24 May 2008.

<http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.terms>>. Document from the Myspace Terms and Conditions which describes basic rules to which participants must adhere.

Prensky, Marc. "Digital Natives Digital Immigrants." *On the Horizon* 9 (2001): 1-6. An article arguing that students have developed as natives in the digital age, requiring teaching style and content to adapt to address their needs and learning styles.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye* . Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951. Classic fictional narrative of a cynical adolescent who has just been expelled from prep school.

Stelter, Brian. "From Myspace to Yourspace." *The New York Times* . 21 Jan. 2008. 24 May 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/21/technology/21myspace.html?scp=7&sq=myspace&st=nyt>>. Article examining the explosion of Myspace in the social-networking scene around the world.

The Smoking Gun, *A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Addiction to Fiction* ,

<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/jamesfrey/0104061jamesfrey1.html>. (3/18/2008). This article critiques the book *A Million Little Pieces* and the fiction that topped the *New York Times* Nonfiction Bestseller list.

White, E.B. *Charlotte's Web*. New York: Harper & Row, 1952. Children's story of a pig and other barn animals personified and that transcend animal boundaries. It also exemplifies the power of the written word.

Wikimedia Foundation. *Wikipedia* . 25 May 2008. [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)>. User-edited, open-source encyclopedia.



## Appendix A

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Text Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Genre: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason Why Reliable/Not Reliable	Concrete Detail from Text (with page number)

Using the Schaeffer Paragraph Model: TS, CD, CM, CM, CS, write a paragraph explaining why the text is or is not reliable.

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