



Biography in the Moment: Studying Civil Rights Leaders at Their Moment of Glory

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Introduction

Studying the lives of others has been a fascination for scholars and students for as long as mankind has focused on communicating through the written word. What is it about others' lives that drives us to study them? It is as if through the study of past lives that we seek to discover something magical or insightful about our own, as if others' lives hold some secret, some unknown key to our own happiness, to our own success. From the Bible to Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*, an endless supply of biographical subjects touch on virtually every aspect of our lives. And so we seek to learn from others; from both the subject of the biography as well as the biographer. I myself remember, as a young child, wanting to read nothing but biography. By the age of eight or nine I knew about Helen Keller, Alexander Graham Bell, Sitting Bull, Ulysses S. Grant, Thomas Edison and countless others. I could not get enough of the reading of biographies as the lives of others simply fascinated me.

But what of writing biography? How many of us who read the lives of others have ever ventured to write about them? Reading a biography and writing one are two very different endeavors. Many of us have written about ourselves, and have had some experience writing about others using primary and secondary sources. But what of the middle school student in this age of "press a button," this information at your fingertips world in which we live? How far will an 8th grader research the life of an assigned subject? How many sources will the student examine? Where will the biography start and end?

Often students writing biographical reports will try to tell the entire life story of the subject when that may not be needed. The writing could instead zero in on that short period of time in which the subject became famous, that unforgettable moment that made them worth writing about in the first place. This is what I want to show my students how to do in this unit on the lives of Civil Rights leaders.

We all know much about Martin Luther King, undoubtedly the most famous of Civil Rights leaders, but when was Dr. King at the peak of his soul searching, of the molding of his legendary personality? Was it when he wrote his letter from the Birmingham jail, when he marched on Washington with so many other activists or in the days leading up to his assassination? Malcolm X may have had an exciting and sordid past, but some of his "moments of glory" occurred during his travels to Africa and the Middle East as his religious pilgrimage changed his message and his personality. We all have moments in which we make discoveries about

ourselves and our world. Using biography to look closely at such moments will lead students to make discoveries and reach realizations about themselves.

The unit I plan to write will be a part of a larger Civil Rights unit that I teach connected to the reading of *Getting Away with Murder; The True Story of the Emmett Till Case* by Chris Crowe. This book will help students to see what I mean by "biography of the moment" as it covers a very short period of Emmet Till's life - but that moment would shape the Civil Rights movement and change US history forever.

Drawing on this example, my students will discover moments that changed other lives, as opposed to the simple telling of a life story. They will begin by discussing biography and autobiography, memoir and anecdote, before writing about themselves and their classmates. Having become both biographers and "biographees," students will then explore the lives of the Civil Rights leaders. Finally I will ask them to work in pairs to role play an interview with a Civil Rights leader of their choice. Students will film the interviews, creating a documentary that will connect events, leaders and players in the Civil Rights era.

Purpose

My hope is that by the end of this unit my students will become more critical readers and writers. They will understand the importance of concentrating in a way that will bring new understanding and appreciation of what biography really is. On a more technical side, my students will begin to understand the importance of revision in their writing as we take our biographies from journals to workshops and finally to a published piece of writing. Students will also experiment with other media as they turn their short biographies of the Civil Rights leaders into scripts for a filmed documentary.

Cooperative learning is an important strategy that must be practiced in the classroom. If students are not given the opportunity to work together and to problem solve together, they miss out on important skills. In this unit students are given a chance to work together in several segments. From the initial interviews of each other to the role playing in the filmed documentary, students will have multiple chances to cooperate and produce work that displays the fruits of their efforts.

The Tools

Journal Writing

Journal writing is key to the success of any language arts classroom. I require students to purchase journals (hard cover marble composition books) at the beginning of the year and keep them in my classroom for weekly writing. There are a variety of ways to set up journals with different sections, table of contents, etc. A great source for more information on journal writing is Ralph Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook* .

Having journals in the classroom provides students with an easy access, low maintenance record of the writing they do. Students are encouraged to write in them often and in a variety of formats. Some pages are listings; there are time lines, illustrations, comics, poetry, questions and a thousand other types of writing and

responses that go into students' journals. Hence the journals become, like the students themselves, individual reflections of personalities and writing styles.

Teachers should participate in all writing activities. After assignments are explained, teachers should sit down, write with the students, and share what they have written with them. This is a good way to encourage students to share with each other, either as a class or in pairs after writing exercises.

Some possible journal topics that will go well in this unit are:

- Make a list of the most memorable moments in your life
- Write a paragraph about yourself from someone else's point of view
- Create a timeline of your life
- List all the important people in your life; choose one and write a paragraph about him or her
- Write a paragraph about something that happened to you that changed your life
- Make a list of interview questions which you will ask your classmate before writing a short biography on his/her life
- Write a journal entry written from Emmett Till's point of view on the day of the incident at Bryant's store/ write a journal entry from one of Till's friends point of view on the day of the incident at Bryant's store
- Create a time line of the Civil Rights Era
- Write a one page monologue from your Civil Right leader's point of view as he gets up to make breakfast in the morning
- Write a one page monologue from your Civil Rights leader's point of view at the moments right before his or her death

Writer Workshop

It is important to get students used to the idea of revision and rewriting before beginning this unit. Students need to understand that unlike in journal writing, which is freer flowing, creative and personal, the writing of biography, and many other types of writing for that matter, is not something that is finished in a first or even second draft. Scores of drafts may be necessary before a piece of writing is really complete.

One way to approach this idea of multiple drafts is to start with journal entries. If students have written a list of the life changing moments in their lives, for example, have them write a paragraph on one of those events. Next, students take the idea to another level, expanding on it in a composition that begins to grow. Students should understand that everything has a beginning, middle and end and that in order to really tell the story they will need to include details and ideas that bring that moment to life for readers.

Once students have a decent draft to work with they should go through some peer editing with partners or with small groups. With teacher's guidance, students should be encouraged through mini-lessons to focus on revisions. After students have gone through a peer edit, and then another draft, they should sit with the teacher and undertake yet another revision. By this time, the student should have completed several drafts and be ready to type the final one on a computer. The students need to understand, though, that even a "final" draft can still be revised.

The more students practice this writing process, and the earlier in the year that they get started, the better off

they will be when it comes to writing this unit and other longer, more formal papers. I always let students know that they are allowed to revise their writing for a better grade any time right up to the end of the marking period. This helps them understand that even their final draft can be improved upon, and that they are responsible for their own writing and grade.

Splatter! And other University Resources

Splatter! is a Yale University student run literary magazine for New Haven's elementary and middle school students. For years I have invited *Splatter!*'s editors into my classroom to help students see their writing in published form. The Yale students run writer workshops in the class, and use the finished products in an on line and printed magazine which they give to the children at the end of the program.

There are also volunteers from Yale who will come in individually to any classroom and help teachers with lessons they are conducting. Both *Splatter!* and the individual volunteers are extremely helpful for teacher and students alike. Another adult in the classroom is always a welcome and any time students can see their work published this is an important step in helping them reach their potential. Most other universities provide opportunities and resources that can be tapped into to make teaching classes a more productive and exciting experience.

Art

For many years I worked in an arts magnet school. All of my academic units culminated with some type of arts project. Students would make sculptures, paintings, masks, creative dioramas, or act out scenes from books they were reading or their own writing. Students' journals can also be a type of artwork as they illustrate and doodle around the writing that they partake in.

I believe that all middle schools should be arts magnet schools, or at least adopt the philosophy of the arts magnet school. In an arts magnet, all students find their niche in which they excel and their work overall improves as they utilize the arts in their work. In this unit I will ask students to finish their work by writing and performing interviews of Civil Rights leaders at the end of the unit. Once again, the arts bring a new, enjoyable depth to the lesson, addressing varied learning styles and philosophies.

The Unit

The unit I am attempting to create takes into account all of the tools mentioned above. We are not simply reading a biographical text and researching Civil Rights leaders; we are attempting to better understand biography, we are learning the importance of journaling, as well as the importance of following the steps in the writing process as we seek to write publishable work in the classroom that touches on multiple intelligences and allows all students to work to their fullest potential at their maximum capabilities.

Student Biographies

As with many of my units, I start with the journals. I ask students to list important events in their lives. I give them five minutes or so to brainstorm the list and then share as a class. Students should feel free to continue adding to the list as other students share. The lists grow as students, hearing their classmates' ideas, add to

their own list. I ask students to look over their lists, put an asterisk next to the one or two which they feel is the most important, and free write a little on the event. Students share their findings in small groups or as a class. Students should also create mini timelines of their lives in their journals. Finally students can brainstorm some questions they would ask if interviewing someone in order to write a biography. Share the questions as a class and encourage students to add questions to their own list as they hear questions that they hadn't thought of.

This point in the unit is a good time to open up the discussion on biography, autobiography and memoir. What are the differences between the three types of writing? Why are there differences and how do the similarities and differences complement or play off of one another? Have students read excerpts from biography, autobiography and memoir. Allow them to see the differences and have a class discussion. Finally ask students to take one of the incidents from the free write exercise and turn it into a first draft of an autobiographical incident. Instead of sharing these first drafts, however, ask students to hand them in so that others (writing biography) will not be influenced by them.

Writing biographies of their classmates is the students' first step into truly understanding biography and autobiography as they prepare to pinpoint the important events that make up the lives of not only their classmates, but of Civil Rights leaders as well. Working in groups of three, ask students to begin interviews of each other utilizing questions which they have brainstormed in their journals. Students should be told that they are not writing the complete life story of their classmates, but just a portion, the portion that they see as one of the most significant events in their partners' lives.

Students should interview each other and determine which event they will focus on. How they come to that determination is one of the most important lessons students will learn from this activity. How does an author determine what the most important aspects of their subjects' lives are? How do we determine, as writers, what the key elements in anyone's life are, and does the subject of the biography always agree with you?

Students will be able to play with this idea as they complete their student biographies. All class members have by this point already written an autobiographical piece and now everyone will also have a biographical piece about one of their group members.

Students should take their interview questions and responses and carry their mini-biographies of each other through the writers' workshop, drafting, peer editing and revising until a final, publishable piece is completed. Students should share their biographies and autobiographies in small groups and notice the differences in their interpretations and understanding of each others lives.

Now that students have had some time to examine biography, autobiography and memoir on a more personal level, the next step in this unit is for students to take their newfound appreciation of biography and apply it to the Civil Rights Movement and the people associated with that movement.

The Civil Rights Movement

Part of my goal in starting this unit stems from my realization that many of my students don't really understand the Civil Rights Movement. Students know about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, but they seldom make the connections between the leaders of the movement and the movement itself. Students don't realize how the figures in the movement were connected, and how they led thousands of other Americans on a journey of change. So it is a good idea to have a discussion of what the movement entailed and who the key players were.

What are civil rights and why are they worth fighting for? Lead students in a discussion of this very basic concept. Start with a dictionary definition of the term, "civil rights" and see what students find. They will quickly see that civil rights are those basic rights (free speech, religious choice, fair and equal treatment by others, etc.) that many of us take for granted all too often. Schedule some computer time so that you can lead students on a Civil Rights internet search that will help them fill in the blanks about the leaders and events that made up the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Finally ask students to work in pairs to create a time line. Work with the entire class to pool ideas and come up with a class version of the project. After going through these exercises, students should have sufficient background to go ahead to the next section of the unit focusing on the players that helped forge gains in the Civil Rights movement from the fifties up until the 1980s.

Emmett Till

This unit came to being as a result of my having taught Chris Crowe's account of the murder of Emmett Till, *Getting Away with Murder*. The book, which focuses on the brutal murder of a 15 year old African American boy from Chicago in Money, Mississippi in 1952, is a required reading for 8th grade students in the New Haven Language Arts Curriculum. Till's "wolf whistle" at a woman in a local store started off a sequence of events that ended with his kidnapping, torture, and murder. The subsequent acquittal of two white men by an all white jury enraged the nation and added fuel to the Civil Rights movement, which was then in its infancy.

It became apparent to me, during the reading of the book, that students did not really understand what Emmett Till's death and the acquittal of his murderers meant. I saw the need for students to understand the Civil Rights movement, along with the murder of Emmett Till, as a sequence of events interwoven in history. Students need to see how all of our lives are intertwined, and for them to understand this, they need to understand biographies that shaped our history.

The story, as told by Crowe, focuses on the trial of the defendants after Till's murder. The first chapter of the book introduces readers to the horrifying abduction and subsequent killing of the boy visiting his relatives in 1952 Mississippi. As you begin reading the book with the class, ask students what Crowe has determined the focus of Emmet's life story should be and why. Clearly the pivotal moment took place at Bryant's Country Store. Ask half the students to write a short, first person entry from Emmett's point of view as to what happened that day in Money. Have the other half of the class write a journal entry from one of Emmett's friend's point of view. Ask students to alternate class readings of journals written by Emmett and those written by Emmett's friends.

Take a moment here to point out the distinction between one character's autobiography and another's biography. How are the points of view different? What do we, the readers need to take into account when digesting second hand information that may or may not be tainted by the point of view of the reporter? Finally ask for volunteers to choose another character to report on that sad day in Money. Students could choose from a host of characters from the book: Carolyn Bryant, the target of the whistle; Uncle Mose, who tried to stop Emmett's murderers from taking him from his house; Roy Bryant, one of the two murderers; a passerby in the store, or any number of other characters. What would their "first hand" account of Emmett and the events of that tragic day reveal about them and about our reading of biography?

Studying this short section on Emmett Till in this manner allows modeling the remainder of the unit for the class. Students will be assigned Civil Rights figures to examine in more depth, trying to discover a turning point in their lives, reporting on it in both a short, biographical paper, and more creatively in an

autobiographical monologue in which they say how it was connected to the murder of Emmett Till.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Without a doubt, the most famous of all African American Civil Rights activists was Martin Luther King, Jr. All school children will know something about him. And it is no coincidence that King had many "moments of glory," leaving a biographer with the tricky task of determining what one to focus on for his biography.

Born in 1929 just prior to the Great Depression, King was a natural preacher. As he writes in his own autobiography, "Of course I was religious. I grew up in the church. My father is a preacher, my grandfather was a preacher, my great-grandfather was a preacher, my only brother is a preacher, and my daddy's brother is a preacher. So I didn't have much choice." ¹ As a youngster he led a comfortable life by his own account, and became involved in the Civil Rights movement when he joined the NAACP in 1954.

King became increasingly active as he led the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in December of 1955 and began to define himself as a leader in the Civil Rights movement. While the boycott was a moving and important episode in King's life, it was not the only one. The 1963 March on Washington was another "moment of glory" among many for King. Unlike Emmett Till, whose short life included little chance to make an active impact on the world, King's life, although also relatively short, was packed with moments of greatness where he and his fellow activists took on the norms of a society which accepted racism and unfairness as a way of life.

How will the young biographer in your class determine whether the Montgomery bus boycott or the March on Washington was King's key "moment of glory?" How did King's imprisonment in Selma, Alabama, or his writing of letters from a Birmingham jail, compare with King's fight against the Vietnam War? With a life so full of activity and achievement, how do we determine what is to be reported? That is a key section of the unit as students are forced to make the decision that biographers must face on a daily basis when working on a project. What will be left in and what will be left out? Students will see that this is an important decision when writing about themselves or others, a decision that can make a big difference on how a story is told.

Malcolm X

While Martin Luther King, Jr. was the voice of civil non-violence during the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X came to represent the search for equality through any means possible. King himself asserted that Malcolm X was a "victim of the despair that inevitably derives from the conditions of oppression, poverty, and injustice which engulf the masses of our race." ²

Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1925. From the start Malcolm seemed destined to a life of "despair" as he began a life in foster homes after his father was killed in a streetcar accident and his mother was sent away to a mental hospital. During the 1940s Malcolm got involved in criminal activity that eventually led to his internment on several occasions. But Malcolm's life in prison may have led to several glorious, life-changing moments, for it was here that he was to begin corresponding with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, a man who would have a huge influence on Malcolm's life. It was also in prison that Malcolm would learn to love to read and write. Students need to look no further than *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* to see that this period had a huge impact on Malcolm's life; "I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive." ³

Another significant period in Malcolm's life came with his travels to the Middle East, culminating with a visit to Mecca in 1963. Again, students can be steered to review Malcolm's own words. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm was clearly aware of the influence the trip would have on his life and teaching. Quoting his own letters, Malcolm writes, "You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to *rearrange* much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions." ⁴

While these two examples from Malcolm X's life represent his own opinion about his "moments of glory," students may find other parts of Malcolm's life equally significant. His meeting with Mohammed Ali, his breaking away from Elijah Mohammed, or his founding of the Organization for Afro-American Unity may also be cited as having massive influence on Malcolm and his development.

Medgar Evers

A somewhat lesser known leader of the Civil Rights Movement was Medgar Evers. Born in Mississippi in 1925, Evers was most famous for being the first field secretary for the NAACP in that state during some of its most turbulent times. Evers is recognized for his efforts to integrate the University of Mississippi and for his courageous efforts on behalf of civil rights during the 1950s. Evers organized voter registration drives, boycotts of businesses that discriminated against African Americans, and investigated racially motivated crimes in a state whose name had become synonymous with racial discrimination. Students will find interesting connections with Till as his murder was one of the cases that Evers helped to investigate. In June of 1963 Evers was gunned down in his own driveway by a member of the Ku Klux Klan, Byron De La Beckwith just a few hours after President Kennedy had announced his new civil rights legislation. ⁵ The trial of De La Beckwith, not unlike the trial of Roy Bryant and his accomplice, brother in law J.W. Milam, ending twice in a hung jury, outraged the nation and helped fan the fires of the Civil Rights Movement. De La Beckwith was eventually brought to trial again and found guilty for the murder in 1994.

Rosa Parks

Another figure from the Civil Rights movement who is very well-known amongst school children is Rosa Parks. Unlike Martin Luther King, Jr., Parks' "moment of glory" seems to have taken place on a single day when she refused to give up her seat on the Montgomery bus. But the focus of students should be not only on that day, but also on the massive impact her action had on the shaping of the future of the movement. Harvard Sitkoff comments in his book, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, "News of her defiance, circulated by the telephone network of Montgomery's black elite, transmitted a sudden surge of determination through the community, a resolve to do *something* ." ⁶ And so began the Montgomery bus boycott.

Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges, like Emmet Till, was not a leader of the Civil Rights Movement, but a symbol of it. Like Rosa Parks, Ruby's "moment of glory" was thrust on to her in a way that she could have never been prepared for. She was the first African American student to be integrated into a non-black school in New Orleans in 1960. She had to be escorted past mobs of angry whites who threw things and threatened her. The community actually refused to let their children study with Ruby, and she consequently spent the first year in William Frantz Elementary School being taught one on one by a teacher from Boston. Students should look at the Norman Rockwell painting, "The Problem We All Live With, 1963" (currently hanging in the White House's West Wing) when discussing Ruby Bridges.

In her award winning book, *Through My Eyes*, Bridges comments on her experience in New Orleans. Among the highlights of Bridges' life since the integration of her school in New Orleans are the creation of the Ruby Bridges Foundation and receiving the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Bill Clinton in 2001.

Jesse Jackson

Jesse Jackson is one of the most prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement still active today. His first encounter with the movement and Martin Luther King came in 1965 during the march in Selma. He worked for the Southern Christian Leadership Council and was at Martin Luther King's side when he was assassinated in 1968. It was Jackson who informed King's wife, Coretta Scott King, that her husband had been shot in Memphis.

Since then Jackson has been continually involved in Civil Rights issues, creating operation Pursuit (People United to Save Humanity) and in 1984 the creation of the National Rainbow Coalition. He has continued to be active politically with two presidential bids and the publication of several books. Students may find researching Jackson's earlier career interesting as they make connections between the players of the time.

Others

It took an army of people to make the Civil Rights movement successful. Depending on how much research students and teachers want to do, there are a multitude of possibilities as to the focus of students' Civil Rights' leaders biographies and subsequent role playing interviews. Many consider John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson as Civil Rights leaders for their roles in supporting Civil Rights legislation. Scores of students courageously participated in lunch counter sit-ins across the South, some of them becoming recognized leaders in the Civil Rights Movement (Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Barry, Julian Bond, John Lewis) ⁷

Participants in the "Freedom Rides" endured beatings, incarceration and racial attacks as they fought to gain equal rights for all Americans. In her book *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement*, Ann Bausum writes in a note, "It is impossible to recognize the hundreds of volunteers from the Freedom Rides in a book so focused on two participants in particular. Yet so many risked their lives and served time in jail to support the cause." ⁸ Bausum goes on to list more than a dozen participants who represent just a small fraction of the number of people who put their lives on the line for the movement.

The Interviews

At the end of the unit, students will be asked to work in pairs and utilize the short biographies they wrote on Civil Rights leaders to create a scripted interview that can be filmed and included in a classroom documentary. Working together, students will come up with the questions and answers for an interview of their leader that will be put together and presented to the class.

While composing the scripts for filming, students will need to keep in mind a few things including the focus on "Biography in the moment." They are not telling the life story of the figures, instead focusing on that figure's key, life-altering moment in history and in relation to the Civil Rights Movement. Students should also include some reference to Emmett Till in their interviews so that the class comes full circle and remembers that it really did take sacrifice on many levels for our country to be truly free.

Lesson Plans

The following sample lesson plans are provided for key moments in this unit. I have tried to provide a sample from what I envision as the beginning, middle, and end of the unit. The lessons are based on fifty-minute class periods.

Sample Lesson Plan One: Getting Started

Objectives

- Students will be able to create a bulleted list of life events to write a short, autobiographical paragraph in journals
- Students will be able to share autobiographical information as a class
- Students will be able to do focused writing on their own lives

Materials

- Student journals

Initiation

What is a key moment in life? Lead a discussion with the class

Procedure

After your brief discussion, share some key moments from your own life with them. What were those moments that changed your life, changed you as a person in some way, or simply had a lasting impression on you. Tell students you are going to make a bulleted list of these events in your journal. Ask them to do the same.

Once students have had a chance to list some key events in their lives, ask them to share the events. Tell the class they can continue to build their list if they hear something that reminds them of their own life. This will help students who are struggling with finding enough events.

After sharing, ask student to go back to their list and put a star next to the one or two incidents that they feel were the most important in their lives. After choosing the topics ask students to write a half to a full page on that particular incident. The teacher should also be writing during this time.

After students have had a chance to write, ask volunteers to read their entries out loud. Often students are reluctant to share what they have written, but the more you allow them to share, the more they will, and you will soon have a community of writers in your classroom.

Closure

Ask students what type of writing they have just participated in. Have they begun an autobiography or a memoir? What do they notice about the focused writing that they have not experienced before? Ask students to expand on their short writing by including more details and expanding the description of their

autobiographical incident to at least a full page. Allow students the chance to finish their writing for homework.

Sample Lesson Plan Two: Interviewing a Classmate

Objectives

- Students will be able to create a list of questions to ask classmates about their lives
- Students will be able to share questions as a class
- Students will be able to interview classmates
- Students will be able to write short biographies of classmates

Materials

- Student journals

Initiation

What is the difference between autobiography and biography? Lead a discussion with the class

Procedure

After your brief discussion, remind students of the autobiographical piece they wrote previously. Remind them that now they are going to be the biographers. What types of questions would we have to ask someone in order to get to the key moments in their lives? What sort of interview questions can probe and bring out this key information in others? Go over a few questions as a class and then ask students to list their questions on their own.

Once students have had a chance to list some questions, ask them to share. As was the case with the bulleted list of key life events, tell the class they can continue to build their list of interview questions if they hear something that reminds them of their own life. This will help students who are struggling with finding enough questions.

Explain to students that they will now interview their classmates and write short biographies about each other. Divide the students into threes and explain that each day over the next three days one student will be interviewed by the other two. At the end of the three day interview session each student will have two short biographies written about them.

Closure

At the close of the interviewing, remind students that they will be carrying their writing through to completed publishable pieces in writer workshop. Review the steps in writer workshop and ask students to do some self-editing for homework.

Sample Lesson Plan Three: Writing a script for the filmed interview of key Civil Rights Figures

Objectives

- Students will be able to create an interview to be filmed based on researched "moment of glory" of Civil Rights leader
- Students will be able to work in small groups to develop questions and answers for interviews
- Students will be able to interview classmates as Civil Rights leaders
- Students will be able to role play parts of Civil Rights leaders

Materials

- Student journals
- interview questions
- mini-research papers on Civil Rights figures

Initiation

Now that students have completed research on Civil Rights leaders have a discussion about the key moments in their lives. Invite students to share what they discovered about the leaders with the rest of the class.

Procedure

After your brief discussion, remind students of the final project they are about to partake in. Go over the Civil Rights interview project directions and ask student to get in their groups and begin planning the final project. Students should be encouraged to research media events that might include their chosen topics to get a better feel how to role play the figures.

Remind students that once again, they are going to be the biographers. What types of questions will they ask the figures in order to fully explore the key moments in their lives? What sort of interview questions can probe and bring out this key information in the leaders and how will they make the connection to the Emmet Till story? Give students time to work on their questions and planning their role-playing session.

Closure

Students will have to be given time to practice their role playing. Once they are ready for filming, go over your expectations one more time. With the help of another adult in the building, arrange for the filming of the interviews. Individual groups will film their interview on their own and the class will view the interviews together as one large documentary.

This final aspect of the unit can be as complicated or as simple as the teacher likes. I have filmed my students role-playing with a cell phone and just hooked it into my computer for them to view. A more complex production may include graphics, screen credits, etc. It is up to the teacher how he or she chooses to present this section of the unit.

Annotated Bibliography

Bausum, Ann. *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006. This thoroughly researched book examines The Freedom Rides, an important part of the Civil Rights movement. Many lesser known characters from the movement are discussed in this well-written young adult book.

Bridges, Ruby, *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1999. This award winning children's book is an autobiographical account of one of the youngest and bravest figures to come out of the Civil Rights era.

Carson, Clayborne, editor. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Time Warner Books, 1998. This classic autobiography of the leading figure of the Civil Rights Movement gives insightful details into the many "moments of glory" that King experienced during the movement.

Crowe, Chris. *Getting Away with Murder; The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. This detailed telling of the tragic story of the murder of Emmett Till is required reading for 8th grade students in the city of New Haven. Crowe's account of the murder and subsequent trial of Roy Bryant and JW Milam is a fascinating look at one of the sparks that flamed the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s.

Fletcher, Ralph. *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. In this excellent resource on how to set up a writer's notebook, Fletcher offers several excellent ideas for use in journal writing.

Haley, Alex. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964. This autobiography is an interesting look into one of the most controversial figures of the Civil Rights movement. The book was also made into a movie which should be utilized by students during preparation for role playing.

King, Coretta Scott. *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. The wife of Martin Luther King writes of inspiring and trying years with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Coretta Scott King may also serve as the focus of students' research in this unit.

Levy, Peter B. *Let Freedom Ring: A Documentary History of the Modern Civil Rights Movement*. Westport: Praeger Books, 1992. Subtitled *A Documentary History of the Civil Rights Movement*, this book utilizes firsthand accounts of participants to trace the development of the Civil Rights Movement.

Marable, Manning. *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. New York: Viking Books, 2011. This well-researched biography on one of the most controversial figures of the Civil Rights Movement taps into numerous resources to tell the story of Malcolm X as it has never been told before.

Powledge, Fred. *Free at Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made it*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991. In a style reminiscent of the work of Studs Terkel, Powledge retraces the events of the Civil Rights Movement as seen and reported by the lesser known participants and witnesses.

Endnotes

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* , 1.
2. King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* , 267.
3. Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* , 206.
4. Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* , 391.
5. Manning Marable, *Malcolm X; A Life of Reinvention* , 241.
6. Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980* , 42.
7. Ann Bausum, *Freedom Riders* , 26.
8. Bausum, *Freedom Riders* , 70.

Appendix: Implementing District Standards

Having completed this unit, students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals for Language Arts:

- Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events.
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums to present a particular topic or idea.
- Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.
- By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive detail and well-structured event sequences.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

With some support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by
· planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or typing a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

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