



Yale-New Haven
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2012 Volume II: The Art of Biography

Reading and Writing the Impact of Violence on Students' Lives

Guide for Curriculum Unit 12.02.09
by Tara Stevens

This unit asks middle-school students to consider the impact that witnessing violence has on one's identity formation. Students will read texts which address state/wartime violence, family violence, urban violence and school violence. Through reading these accounts, students will be asked to consider the reaction of the subject (in the case of memoir or biography) or the protagonist (in the case of fiction) to his or her surroundings. As students work through a variety of writing and discussion activities, they will develop an initial thesis as to the impact of violence on identity formation. The culminating activity will be an argumentative essay in which students pose a theory as to the effect of violence on identity formation using the mentor texts and personal anecdotes as evidence.

The ultimate goal is that through these exercises, students will grow to understand that their experiences are not so different from the experiences of people in distant places and times. Middle-school students, who often feel so isolated, can feel less lonely and can learn through the experiences of others how to cope with the trauma that is often a part of their lives.

(Recommended for English Language Arts and Social Studies, grade 8)

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