



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Making Meaning: The Search for Identity through Family History

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Introduction

"Memoir must be written because each of us must possess a created version of the past. Created: that is, real in the sense of the tangible, made of the stuff of a life lived in place and in history... If we refuse to do the work of creating this personal version of the past, someone else will do it for us"(Hampl, 32).

In every adult's life there are images, events and people that shape them towards the person they are to become. Some of these chapters are fondly remembered and relayed, and others are things that we wish we could forget but cannot. We tell these stories to our friends, our children and, as teachers, we tell these stories to our students as evidence of the road we have travelled to end up where we are. For the most part we are proud of these stories that make us into our true selves, but many times we are compelled to relay a story that we are not proud of in order to illustrate our hardships and convey our ability to empathize with others. The ability to write reflectively about our past is an important step toward owning our identity. Writing about life is a process that can be at once gratifying, difficult, and cathartic. We revisit our memories and craft the pleasure and pain into a cohesive image of our past and present selves. We empower ourselves through this reflective process because we ultimately learn that we have a message to convey to our readers. Our voice and our story are important.

Exploring our personal identity is not an easy process, and it can be especially difficult for teenagers as many are still trying to define their identity. Watching high school students struggle to find their place in society can be at times entertaining and at times heartbreaking. Some students assert their individuality through the ways they dress and express themselves, some act out and rebel, and still others throw themselves into their social life hoping to be accepted by their peers. All teens go through a phase of self-exploration where they seek to define themselves through their interests, talents, and individual personality.

In an urban area the usual teenage angst can be complicated by many factors which make it more difficult for teens to define themselves. Teens from underprivileged families struggle with some very adult problems that can get in the way of their exploration of themselves. Erik Erickson determined that as teens navigate their

period of identity development they observe role models, peers, and other adults to help make decisions about their values, aspirations, and social lives. If teens are supported and guided through this period they will come out having successfully established their own personal identity. If teens are not supported they will end up with role confusion. Because of the environment that many urban teens grow up in there is no guarantee that these teens will have the support they need to manage this difficult and confusing time in their development.

As teachers it is our job to help our students navigate through this time, and knowing that they might not have the necessary supports at home makes it all the more important that we consider how best to foster their identity development in our classrooms. In designing this unit, my purpose was to create an investigation into identity through literature, research and writing. Students will analyze a piece of literature with the central theme of finding identity to help inform their thinking about what it takes to make the successful transition to adulthood and how our past prepares us for our future. My choice to use memoir through which to conduct reflective reading and writing is best summarized by William Zinsser in his book *Inventing the Truth*, "Memoir is how we make sense of who we are, who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us. If a writer seriously embarks on that quest, readers will be nourished by the journey, bringing along many associations with quests of their own"(Zinsser, 6). Through reading memoir, I hope my students are inspired and encouraged by the authors who have embarked on a quest to define their identity. Through writing their own personal history, I hope my students are able to arrive at the truth of their past and the promise of their present.

Rationale

The first step in designing this unit was to develop an engaging essential question. As the class is an AP Language class much of the curriculum is based upon the principles of argumentation and I always like to put together a question that will allow students to develop and defend a position on a broad topic. Thought-provoking AP Language questions require students to inspect relationships within these broad topics and I thought that looking analytically at the relationship between our past and our future would be a wonderful and engaging topic. The question I have decided upon for this unit is: In what ways does our past affect our future and help to shape our identity? I felt that this question would leave ample room for the class to explore many topics related to the search for identity, memory, and the creation of our past and future selves, while forcing reflection on how our experiences affect our development.

Literature is filled with examples of famous characters searching for identity, but students find it most easy to connect with characters like themselves – real people with real problems. In choosing literature to support the essential question I wanted to pick something that would be very engaging and relevant and would also be in line with the common core standards push toward non-fiction. I chose a memoir called *The Color of Water* by James McBride. I thought this particular book would be perfect for several reasons. First, although it is non-fiction, memoir is a sub-genre often labeled "creative non-fiction" which combines the artistry of literature with a basis in the factual. The stories that are included are true, but the author has creative license to embellish them with imagery, characterization, and interesting narrative. In *The Color of Water* the author makes many interesting stylistic and organizational choices that would give my students plenty of opportunities to analyze the author's purpose in conveying his message in this way.

The other major benefit of this particular book is that the themes are very relevant to my audience. The author is a mixed race man trying to navigate his search for identity in the Red Hook Housing Projects. His hard-working mother and mostly absent father(s) do not offer the kind of support he needs to assert his individuality in a house full of twelve children. Because of this, the author sets out on his own identity quest using his experiences alongside the research he compiles on his mother's life to fill in the holes in his understanding. The product is a very reflective and rich coming of age story that spans two generations. The story of the author's mother weaves in and out of his own narrative and as the author gains a greater understanding of his roots, he also gains a stronger foundation for his own identity.

I believe that students will see many parallels between their lives and the author's story. The narrative is filled with the types of experiences that most teenagers have – fighting with siblings, getting in trouble at school, the importance of education versus the need to have a social life. The narrative is also filled with experiences that are unique to underprivileged teenagers – not having enough food on the table, fighting for time with parents who are overworked, the realization that others have more opportunities because of their race or socio-economic class. As the story unfolds my students can watch James McBride struggle to establish his own identity while asking many of the same questions that they themselves are struggling with.

To supplement the class's reading of *The Color of Water* students will also participate in a personal search for identity through examining their own roots and reflecting upon where they have come from and where they are going. Each student will complete a Family History Project where they will write about their family dynamics, interview family members, research important historical events that have impacted their families, and dig into their family's history in the city of New Haven (or the city that they call home). As students uncover the place of their family in the context of their world, they will hopefully gain a greater understanding of how the past events of our memories help to shape who we ultimately become in the future. By looking to prior generations students will have a more solid understanding of their foundation. They will learn things about their family that they never realized and hopefully will be able to see how learning about their roots can help them understand things about themselves. The end product will be part history, part biography and part memoir as students weave the research they have completed on their family into their own story much as the author of *The Color of Water* did.

My hope is that this unit will give my students a greater understanding of where they came from and a firmer idea of where they will go. As we near the end of the school year, hopefully students will take this opportunity to look to the past, consider the memories that represent their current body of experience, and begin to think about how they will shape their future memories through their choices.

Objectives

Reading

SWBAT determine the central themes of a text and analyze their development through the text.

SWBAT analyze how the author's organizational choices affect the way the story unfolds.

Writing

SWBAT write in both narrative and expository forms.

Research

SWBAT evaluate multiple sources of information in order to answer a question.

SWBAT create an engaging research question and use both primary and secondary sources to answer it.

Part 1 - Autobiography

In order to lay the foundation of this unit, students first will need to have a basic understanding of autobiographical writing. A good place to start is to have a general discussion about the difference between non-fiction writing and fiction writing. As a class, brainstorm a list of examples of non-fiction books that the students have read. Many students have read *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and can easily describe the features of those texts versus the fictional stories that they have read. To deepen the discussion the class should seek to answer the question:

How do authors present truth using literary features in an autobiography?

Before moving on, you will want to discuss with students the differences between an autobiography and a memoir. As the book they will read is a memoir, it will be important for them to understand the main distinctions between the two. Although both autobiographies and memoirs are based upon the true events of an author's life, an autobiography is a researched account that usually spans an author's entire life giving specific dates and historical information as the story moves through the author's life chronologically. Many times an autobiography reads more like a historical document and can be considered a true work of non-fiction because of its attention to detail and supporting documentation. A memoir doesn't follow the same restrictive rules of documentation as an autobiography and is much more focused upon recounting events as they are remembered by the author. In a memoir the truth that the author is trying to convey to their reader is more of an emotional truth than a factual one and therefore, memoirs feel much more personal to the reader than an autobiography would. Memoirs are usually written to be more episodic than chronological. The story told can focus on one key event in the author's life or a certain formative span of years, but each episode is connected to the whole work through a defining theme.

This unit focuses on memoir because of the opportunity that this sub-genre creates for students to look at how an author combines both the artistry of writing with a truthful account of the events that shaped them. To begin teaching students how to pick out the literary features in a memoir, ask the class to focus on four areas – narrative, characterization, setting, and theme. By focusing the students' attention on the more literary features of the text, students will begin to understand that there is a craft in creating an engaging and powerful memoir that goes beyond just writing the truth.

At this point, you might deepen the discussion by bringing up the controversy surrounding memoir to probe students to reconsider how they perceive truth in literature. To accomplish this, I suggest presenting the students with the case of James Frey's memoir *A Million Little Pieces*, which was heavily criticized most famously by Oprah Winfrey for fabricating the truth in several instances. This is a great example through which to discuss the differences between a memoir and a true autobiography because a memoir is much more

literary and not necessarily held to the same standards as a true autobiography. Authors structure their memoirs to recount their memories, but memory is subjective and over time and circumstances can be fluid and changeable. Students debate the importance of telling a true story, and where truth meets fiction in a memoir. As a class we discuss the tools memoirists use to create a piece of literature from their memories.

Part 1 - Resources

To introduce students to autobiographical writing, I suggest using an excerpt from a classic piece from Annie Dillard's *An American Childhood*. The excerpt recounts a childhood experience where she is chased by an angry adult after throwing a snowball. As a class, we would analyze this piece looking for how the author uses narrative, characterization, and setting to forward her theme.

To deepen the students' understanding of autobiography, we would then look at an excerpt from a contemporary piece by Louis Rodriguez called *Always Running* which recounts a similar experience to Dillard's but with a very different lens. In Dillard's experience the running she does is exhilarating and freeing, while Rodriguez's escape from the police is terrifying and humiliating. Both authors present a childhood scene where they are caught doing something they shouldn't, but in Rodriguez's world this scene takes a dark turn that Dillard doesn't encounter in hers. Students will compare and contrast how the two authors' use literary features to accomplish the very different effect conveyed by each piece.

In addressing the controversy around James Frey, there are many different resources available. I suggest giving the students the first two to three pages from his memoir *A Million Little Pieces* which are pretty shocking in their graphic details. This is great fuel for a discussion when students find out that the details of this occurrence have been changed. There are many articles available from various news sources, and also clips from the Oprah Winfrey Show of Oprah interviewing Frey about the inconsistency of his book. One resource you can give to students is the Reader's Note written by Frey to be included in subsequent printings of his memoir. This note justifies his choices in taking creative license with the text. I also suggest using the essay "Oprah, James Frey, and Truth" written by Rev. Dr. Mark Roberts, and "The Truth About Lying" by Joseph Kertes. Both articles directly address the debate surrounding truth versus creativity in memoir, and Frey's book specifically.

Part 1 - Suggestions for Further Reading

There are of course many fine examples of memoir that a teacher could use to teach this unit. I chose *The Color of Water* because I felt that the struggles presented by this author would be most accessible to my students. Another wonderful memoir that could be used to teach this unit is *The Glass Castle* which also allows the reader to carefully analyze the family dynamics that shape the author. This text often sparks heated debate among my students focused upon parenting styles because although the author's parents are both brilliant and artistic, they are also irresponsible and unsuccessful. By tracing the author's experiences throughout the memoir, students can see how her parents' good qualities help to make her a strong adult, while also causing her to face many obstacles throughout her adolescence. Another book that could work well when teaching this unit is *Angela's Ashes*. In addition to once again providing an opportunity to examine family dynamics this text also allows for some cultural and historical research into Irish society, the effects of English government, the Irish Revolution, and the influence of Catholicism on the family.

Part 2 - Identity Development

The school that I teach at is a magnet school with a Health Sciences theme, and our task is to tie our teaching into this theme when possible. I find that students are very interested in learning about some of the psychological principles behind Identity Development in children. The way I suggest integrating this topic into the unit is through focusing on two phases in the main character James McBride's development in his memoir *The Color of Water*. After reading the first 100 or so pages that recount McBride's early childhood experiences look at Socialization and discuss the difference between Primary and Secondary Socialization in children. I would then give students a challenging article describing these two modes of socialization to read and discuss as a class. Students can give examples from their own lives and then the class can analyze the stories of both James and his mother Ruth to look for examples of Primary and Secondary Socialization.

As the story moves on James goes through his teenage years and has a severe bout of rebellious teenage behavior. During this section I would focus on Erick Erickson's research on the stages of development and present the students with his theory on Stage 5 - Identity V. Role Confusion. Once again students would be given a challenging article to read and then as a class we would discuss this stage. The class will most likely have many personal examples to draw upon since this is the stage of development that they are currently experiencing, which will provide for positive student engagement. The class can first discuss their own experiences and challenges during this stage, and then dig into the literature to discuss both James's experiences and his mother Ruth's experiences.

Finally to address the complicating factors of race in identity development I suggest introducing an excerpt from the book *NurtureShock* called *See Baby Discriminate*. This article discusses how parents address questions of race with their children and makes the point that few families have completely open and honest communication about questions of race. This presents a nice compliment to the book *The Color of Water* since one of the main factors in James's identity development is his mother's unwillingness to address his questions of race due to his mixed race heritage. In my class of mostly African American students, this topic provides a very good vehicle for an interesting discussion on how race is addressed in their own families and how this has made them either more or less comfortable with their ethnicity.

Part 2 - Resources

I use the text *Child, Family, School, Community: Socialization and Support* to provide my students with a brief overview of Socialization. This text explains the basics of sociology in a way that my class can understand. Depending on how deeply you want to get into the topic the text provides chapters that lead through all of the different aspects of socialization and looks at the roles of parents, adults, peers, and teacher in a child's social development. Erick Erickson's research on the Stages of Development was also very helpful in crafting this part of my unit. I have included two books on my reading list *Identity and the Life Cycle* and *Childhood and Society* that proved helpful in understanding the link between childhood, adolescence, and the formulation of identity. Lev Vygotsky's work on Social Learning Theory was also very helpful in creating a link between identity, education and socialization. To provide articles that are accessible to students, I suggest *Theories of Childhood*, which gives an overview of the educational theories of many of the major psychologists working in this field. My purpose in introducing this was to make a link to Human Development and Psychology and to hone my students' skills in reading challenging non-fiction articles so, when giving students resources to read and research, I use excerpts that present an overview of the major topics.

Part 2 – Suggestions for Further Reading

I only used one chapter from *NurtureShock* in my unit; however, the book is filled with very compelling and research based studies of different aspects of childhood, adolescence and parenting and gives some eye-opening information about the effects of social and parental practices on identity development. Two chapters that related very closely to this unit were "The Science of Teen Rebellion" and "Plays Well With Others" which both discuss how peers and parents affect social development.

There are many cross-curricular connections that can be made through the genre of memoir which will allow the teacher to tailor the unit for the interests of the students, the magnet theme of the school, or the essential curriculum questions. One interesting direction that could be pursued in this part of the unit is to look at how culture and education affect social development. A text that presents a very interesting study of how culture affects the way a child is raised is *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. In this book, the author couples research about the Hmong refugees from Laos with a story of a young Hmong child with epilepsy. The story follows the clash between the doctors' ideas about how to care for the girl, and the family's traditional Hmong beliefs. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* also places the story of a family at odds with the medical community in a way that brings up many questions of ethics as the family battles for recognition of their contribution to advances in scientific research.

Part 3 – Family History Research

As a culminating assignment students will write a researched family history where they will use both narrative writing and expository writing to present the story of their family much like James McBride did in *The Color of Water*. The family history will consist of the following parts – Introduction, Memoir, Research, and Conclusion. In the introduction, students will briefly outline their family dynamics by discussing who they consider to be their nuclear family and where they call their home. In the memoir section, students will experiment with narrative as a memoirist would by creating three vignettes to present a person, place, and event that had an impact upon them.

The research section will be the student's most intense undertaking and will require them to interview family members as primary sources. Their interviews with their chosen family members will lead them to create a research question that they will then use secondary sources to research. For example, a student with Jamaican heritage might be interested in learning more about the political or economical events that caused his family to emigrate from Jamaica. This student will use the interviews with their family members as a starting point and then look to various articles or news sources to determine what factors came into play.

Some students find it very difficult to interview certain family members, or want to write about aspects of their family that make it impossible for them to conduct formal research. As an alternative to this section, I suggest an assignment where students dig through their family memorabilia and present their journey in writing as a wonderful way to allow for individuality and creativity in the final project. For instance, a student wanting to learn more about a deceased relative could sort through the family memorabilia surrounding this relative to piece together a history for this person. A grandfather's life could be outlined through pictures, keepsakes, war medals, and family records. In this way, students would still be doing family research, but it would be of a more exploratory and personal nature than inventing a formal research question to work around.

Part 3 - Resources

In order for students to be able to complete the research portion of this project they need to be taught how to interview, what questions to ask, what makes an engaging research question, and how to find reliable sources on the internet. This can be accomplished in a variety of different ways. There are many resources available for compiling genealogical research that give suggested interview questions. I think it would be helpful to give the students some questions to ask as a beginning point before asking them to generate their own questions. One book that is helpful for this was *To Our Children's Children* , which gave many good questions to ask when interviewing. Some students will be more motivated to research their family history than others. I use an interview with Alex Haley, author of *Roots*, where he discusses the search for his past and what it meant to him to be able to write the story down for future generations. This interview, as well as other educator resources, are available at: www.kintehaley.org. One of the most motivational things I found to do with students was have brief one-on-one meetings to help them formulate a good research question or to give them an idea of which direction they would like to proceed. I discovered that a conversation about their family usually revealed some mystery that they wanted to solve or some person or place that they were interested in learning more about.

Part 3 - Suggestions for Further Reading

In this section students are free to choose how they want to tackle researching their family origins. The most rich research questions will be developed around the relationship between history, society, and family. Basically they should consider how history affected their family, and then how their family created history for itself. One resource I found helpful when considering the history of immigrant populations in America was *American Mosaic* , which is a collection of stories from immigrants to the United States that span over a hundred years and give a very good picture of how these immigrants lives were affected by their experiences. Many of my students can trace their family history to the southern cities and the great migration, therefore I thought that *The Warmth of Other Suns* was a very good resource for me in understanding the factors in migrating and the experiences of those who moved to the north from the south at this time. Some students chose to write about their family's connection with the city that they currently live in, which is very interesting when their history in that city goes back generations. One author that uses this model very effectively is Edward Rutherford. In his books he uses the stories of the citizens of a certain city or country to tell the history of that place. I recommend his book *New York* . For a look at the history of New Haven, the book *City: Urbanism and Its End* looks closely at many factors throughout New Haven's long history that came together to make it the city we currently live in. If you would like to continue your research on the city of New Haven, there is also the New Haven Museum which is filled with interesting documents, exhibits, and curators to answer your questions.

Teaching Strategies

Book Clubs

The class will use a book club protocol to engage in discussion about the text, *The Color of Water* . Book clubs will consist of three students and will meet once per week to discuss their reading, questions, and connections. Each group will set a goal for the week and will be responsible for bringing in questions, quotes,

and thoughts on the different themes in the text. Students will each have a job during the book club meetings, either facilitator, time keeper or scribe. Book clubs will meet for a half an hour and have three tasks to complete. Students will present two of their own questions to the group and have a discussion about these questions. Next, students will choose one of two deep thinking questions to answer in a paragraph. Then students will fill in a graphic organizer that asks them to record the literary points discussed, focusing on narrative, characterization, setting and theme.

By allowing students to meet in book clubs it allows them to take more responsibility for their learning. Instead of a teacher-centered protocol where the discussion is based upon the teacher's questions, students can direct the conversation to the elements that they are most interested in within the story. By breaking students into groups, the teacher can better assess the understanding of individual students by visiting groups, participating in the discussion, and asking probing questions. The teacher can also use the groups for differentiation by grouping students by ability level in either homogenous or heterogeneous groups depending on the needs of the students.

Workshop Model

When having students analyze complex texts the workshop model works well to scaffold the learning. The basic structure of the lesson is to give the students the text to tackle independently and then support them where needed. Below are listed the steps to running a successful workshop lesson:

Engage - Each workshop model lesson begins with a brief engagement to capture the class's attention and set the purpose for the lesson. Some kind of question to answer or mystery to solve works best to get the students thinking about the topic.

Grapple - Students are then given the text, or an excerpt of the text, to tackle independently. They annotate the text as they read, noting unfamiliar words and marking passages that bear closer analysis. By allowing students to first struggle with the text it builds independence and self-reliance.

Discuss - Students are then provided with text based questions which require them to look into the text for different purposes. The class spends a few minutes answering these questions independently and then the whole class discusses. Questions can range from asking students about vocabulary words in context to questions that provoke thinking about the themes of the passage. One protocol that works well at this point is a think-pair-share where students first consider a question independently, then pair up with a partner to discuss their thoughts, before finally sharing their ideas with the whole class.

Focus - Once the class shares their responses to the questions, the teacher is able to monitor and assess students understanding of the text. At this point the teacher will craft a mini-lesson to address anything that the students are struggling with. These lessons are no longer than ten minutes and basically just focus upon mopping up anything that the students didn't quite understand during their first reading.

Apply - At this point students are given a task to complete using the new learning they received in the reading. For my purpose, I had students read articles on Human Development and then apply them to their reading of the book *The Color of Water*. I put the students into their book club groups and had them discuss the connections they could make between the book, the article, and themselves when possible.

Synthesize - As a final step the class shares their thoughts from their small group discussion. As a class we look back at the initial mystery or question that was introduced in the engage section and the lesson is

debriefed.

A full workshop model lesson is usually taught in an 80 minute block period; however, I have used this model successfully in my 50 minute classes. One way to do this is to assign an application task for homework and basically split the workshop into two days. For an example of a lesson developed using the workshop model, see lesson plan 2 in the lesson plan section. The basic premise of the workshop model is to encourage students to decode challenging texts through multiple readings. As the students complete their first reading and move on to the next, the tasks get increasingly more difficult allowing them to move past comprehension to analysis, application, and finally synthesis.

Writing Lab

The accompanying essay assignment for this unit requires students to complete several smaller tasks which might become overwhelming and confusing for students to tackle independently so I suggest dedicating one day per week as a writing lab day where students would be responsible for writing and editing one section of their final project. In order for this to be most effective, it will be necessary to lay the foundation of providing students with a common language for writing assessment. I do this through teaching them the 6+1 Traits of Writing. The class spends a writing lab time focusing on skills instruction instead of content. We look at a sample essay and discuss what makes this essay well written. As a class we identify some things that we look for in good writing and then compare our traits of good writing to the 6+1 Traits. Students often find that most of the things they liked in the exemplar are mentioned in the 6+1 Traits. This proves to be affirming for both the students as they realize that they are already fairly comfortable with telling "good" writing from writing that needs improvement. Students will then go through their writing portfolios and meet in groups to discuss a piece of writing that they choose to share with their peers. Groups of students use the 6+1 Traits to assess each others' writing and discuss what the strengths and weaknesses of each piece were.

Once we establish a common language through which to assess our writing, I would introduce the essay topic we would use over the next few weeks. As the unit progresses students are given specific traits to focus upon in their different drafts and revisions. On the first draft, students will focus primarily upon ideas and organization. Their main concern at this point is generating a strong thesis statement and supporting this thesis statement through their body paragraphs. During the in-class workshop students meet in peer groups to measure each other's essays on a rubric designed to assess these two traits alone. As students work through assessing each other, I will pull individual students to conference about the strengths and weaknesses of their essays. Students then will have two days to revise their essays before they hand in the revision to be assessed by me formally. Once those revisions are handed back, students were told to focus on voice and diction to polish the language they used in their essay and make it more formal and specific. We will repeat the process using diction and language this time and in the final writing lab the students are told to focus upon presentation and conventions of English. The class then completes a final revision on their essay making sure that it meets all the formatting requirements and the mechanics are as close to perfect as possible. During the writing lab students peer edit to give each other's paper a final polish and assess each other on a rubric designed to measure presentation and correctness while I pull students to conference. Because of this process, I am able to give students more specific feedback on each piece of their essay and on each draft and revision. They also have multiple sets of eyes looking for errors and places they could improve because their peers got involved in the editing process. Allowing students to write in class will clear up many of the technological challenges that present themselves when working with a low income population. Finally conferencing is very helpful in keeping the class honest and on task when it came to deadlines and the quality of their writing.

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1 - Book Club Record for *The Color of Water*

Names of Group members: _____

Choose a facilitator, a timekeeper, and a scribe to fill out this form:

Facilitator _____ Timekeeper _____ Scribe _____

Read through the questions you collected as you read and decide upon two questions that the group will discuss.

Question 1

Notes on the discussion:

Question 2

Notes on the discussion:

Deep Thinking Questions

- On a Separate piece of paper, choose one of these two questions to answer in a well-organized paragraph of $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page.

- McBride writes, "Yet conflict was a part of our lives, written into our very faces, hands, and arms, and to see how contradiction lives and survived in its essences, we had to look no further than our own mother" (29). How is conflict written into the McBride children's very bodies? How did contradiction live and survive in his mother?

- Describe Ruth's experience in church, which is the only time her children see her cry. How does she explain her crying? Why do you think that church is the only place she cries?

Literary Points

- Directions: Use the quotes that you brought to class to discuss the writing features of autobiography -- Narrative, Characterization, Setting, Theme.

- Each member should give a quote that shows an example of how the author uses these different features to

create a rich and engaging story.

Name	Literary Points Discussed (Theme, characterization, symbolism, writer's style/craft, plot devices, conflict, etc)

Lesson 2 - See Baby Discriminate Reading Workshop

"...one afternoon on the way home from church I asked her whether God was black or white. A deep sigh. 'Oh boy...God's not black. He's not white. He's a spirit.' ... 'What color is God's spirit?' 'It doesn't have a color,' she said. 'God is the color of water. Water doesn't have a color'"(McBride, Pg.50).

Mommy deliberately avoids answering questions of race with her children even though they repeatedly ask. She hopes to create a colorblind world for her children where they measure themselves by character and values, not race.

Essential Question:

- Is Mommy's theory of dealing with questions of race and ethnicity a positive or negative influence on James's search for identity?
- What does psychological research say is the best way to deal with these questions?

Article – See Baby Discriminate

Read your assigned section of the article and identify what the gist (main idea) is in that section. Then give the evidence that supports your thoughts.

Section	Gist What is the “point” of this section? What does the author prove here?	Evidence What support does the author give? What did you find interesting?
1		
2		
3		
4		

Final Response Question

In a well-organized response, take and support a position on the essential question using evidence from the text and article, as well as examples from your own experience. You may defend, challenge or qualify Mommy's actions in your response.

Lesson 3 -- Writing Rubric for Peer Assessment - Adapted from the *6+1 Traits of Writing* .

	Strong	Developing	Beginning
Ideas	This narrow and manageable topic is made vivid through relevant telling and details that share interesting information with the reader.	While ideas are clear, additional details would expand general ideas and enrich the essay.	Ideas, details or events seem strung together in a loose or random fashion. Connections between ideas are unclear or not present
Organization	An inviting introduction draws the reader in to a piece where the details and sequencing are logical & effective, and transitions are used to show how thoughtful ideas connect. From start to finish, organization flows smoothly.	The organizational structure is strong enough to move the reader through the text without too much confusion.	The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic and/or the audience. Because the writing lacks risk, it comes across as lifeless or mechanical.
Voice	The object has a personality that adds interest to the writing so that the reader feels an interaction with the writer.	The writer seems sincere but not fully engaged or involved. The writing is pleasant or personable, but not compelling.	Limited, vague, vocabulary may leave the reader wondering what the author is really trying to say.
Word Choice	Words and phrases are specific and accurate. They create images that linger in the reader's mind.	The language is functional, even if it lacks much energy. It's easy to figure out the writer's meaning on a general level.	The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic and/or the audience.
Sentence Fluency	Sentences vary in length and in structure. Fragments, if used, add style. Dialogue, if present, sounds natural.	The text has a steady beat. While it is more mechanical than fluid, parts of the text do invite expressive reading while other parts seem stiff, awkward or choppy.	The writing is not compelling because there is little or no "sentence sense" present or too many sentences start the same way and follow the same patterns.
Conventions	The writer demonstrates a strong grasp of standard writing	The writer shows reasonable control over a limited range of	Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, usage

	conventions (eg. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar and usage, paragraphing) and uses conventions effectively to enhance readability. Errors are few.	standard writing conventions. At times conventions are handled well and enhance readability, at other times errors are distracting.	and grammar, and/or paragraphing repeatedly distract the reader and make the text difficult to read.
Presentation	The form and presentation of the text enhances the ability of the reader to understand and connect with the message. It is pleasing to the eye.	The writer's message is understandable in this format.	The reader receives a garbled message due to problems relating to the presentation of the text.

Final Assessment

There are many different creative ways to assess your students' learning for this unit depending on your objectives and your district's curriculum requirements. The different writing assignments could be turned into one large multi-part research paper, or you could allow students to use the writing portions to put together a scrap book. Students could video tape interviews with relatives and scan family pictures to create a slide show or video documentary. A family tree could be created on a poster board with the names, pictures and histories of each known family member. The class could even have a family history day where each student shares some of the stories, pictures, and interviews they have collected through the process of researching their family. Since the writing is meant to be the student's journey into finding and defining their identity, it is a good opportunity to allow for some flexibility and creativity in the final product so that it truly reflects their personality and path.

Reading List

On Memoir

Dillard, Annie . *An American Childhood* – Annie Dillard. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997.

Frey, James. *A Million Little Pieces* . New York: Random House, 2003.

Hampl, Patricia. *I Could Tell You Stories*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999

Kertes, Joseph. "The Truth About Lying" in *The Walrus* , volume 3, issue 5, June 2006.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes*. Scribner: New York, 1996.

Roberts, Rev. Dr. Mark D. "Oprah, James Frey, and the Question of Truth."
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Rodriguez, Luis. *Always Running*. New York: Touchstone, 1994.

Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Random House, 2011.

Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle*. New York: Scribner, 2005.

Zinsser, William. *Inventing the Truth*. New York: First Mariner, 1998.

On Identity Development

Berns, Robert. *Child, Family, School, Community: Socialization and Support*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2010.

Bronson, Po and Ashley Merryman. *NurtureShock: New Thinking About Children*. New York: Hatchette Book Group, 2009.

Erickson, Erik. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980.

Erickson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950.

Mooney, Carol. *Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget & Vygotsky*. St Paul: Readleaf Press, 2000.

Tatum, Beverly. *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* New York: Basic Books, 1997.

On Writing

Culham, Ruth. *6+1 Traits of Good Writing*. Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995.

King, Stephen. *On Writing – A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000.

Perl, Sondra & Schwartz, Mimi. *Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Non-Fiction*. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2006.

Strunk, William & White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*. London: Longman, 1999.

On Family History

Greene, Bob & Fulford D.G. *To Our Children's Children: Preserving Family Histories for Generations to Come*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.

Haley, Alex. *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. New York: Vanguard, 1974.

Morrison, Joan & Zabusky, Fox. *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg, 1980.

Rutherford, Edward. *New York*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Rae, Douglas. *City: Urbanism and Its End*. New Haven: Yale University, 2003.

Smolenyak, Megan. *Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing Your Family History*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Notes

1. Patricia Hampl, *I Could Tell You Stories*, 32

2. William Zinsser, *Inventing the Truth*, 6

3. James McBride, *The Color of Water*, 50

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