



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1982 Volume II: Autobiography

Who Do You Think You Are?

Guide for Curriculum Unit 82.02.02
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“Who Do You Think You Are?” will allow students to remember, discuss and record significant events and people in their lives. They will discover the reality of the past. Remembering, a solitary activity, will be more than reminiscence; reasons and patterns will be sought. Students will come to recognize and realize their uniqueness as individuals and as group members. “Group” refers to our classroom as well as to our families. Theatre games stressing trust, cooperation and a sense of community are an integral part of this unit; the good which can come from these activities goes beyond the unit. The improvement of reading and writing skills is the heart of the unit. Excerpts from autobiographies will be read and discussed. More importantly, the excerpts will serve as models for student-written autobiographies. Identifying the voice of a writer is an important facet of this objective. The process of identification will be part of the process from the beginning. Helping students understand that a problem may have a number of possible solutions is important.

Specifically, each activity in the unit will be composed of:

I. Lead-up. A theatre exercise will usually precede a reading assignment.

II. Literature. Brief selections from a number of autobiographies will be read and discussed in class. The readings will be used as springboards for student writings.

All discussions must deal with the phenomenon of voice. Such discussions should elicit the individuality of the writer under scrutiny.

III. Writing. Writing assignments would range from the broad (“Make a list of ten words which describe you.”) to the more specific (“What qualities distinguish you from your friends? your enemies? your family?”). The progression that is important in the structure of theatre games is as important in the structure of the writing assignments.

IV. Follow-up. I have chosen to make the Humanities especially important in the follow-up activities. In addition to providing further opportunities for self-expression and self-exploration, they will reinforce the theme of “connectedness” which underlies the unit.

A tangible end-product of “Who Do You Think You Are?” will be an autobiographical booklet, two-fold in nature: a collection of personal writings and observations and an anthology culled from the former which could be shared with parents and other classes.

(Recommended for 7th and 8th grades English/Language Arts)

Key Words

Reading Instruction Autobiography Writing

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