



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

Scribe of Self

Curriculum Unit 82.02.04
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This curriculum unit is geared for seventh and eighth grade English students who attend an inner city school. The reading levels for my students range from third to ninth. The attention span for many of these students is quite limited, which necessitates short readings rather than whole book assignments/ It may be necessary for the teacher to grade some of the first papers holistically so that the student does not feel threatened. The amount of work expected depends on the particular work level of each class. Through autobiography students can be motivated to do creative writing.

Poor students get overwhelmed easily. To prevent this break up lesson plans into small doses. They need to feel success en route. Constant reinforcement and encouragement are a must. Remember a day at a time. Some of my selections are geared to the Black and Puerto Rican students I teach. It is important that they read material of ethnic value.

As teachers we want students to write more. Students find writing difficult because they usually have little to say. We punish ourselves when we have to correct boring writings. Pre-writing gives students a chance to share their work with classmates first. Discuss the first drafts as preparations for the actual writing. No one wants to be the dumb one. If we give the students chances in a non-threatening atmosphere their creativity will better surface. Otherwise there would not be enough corners in the room for all the dunces.

This Emily Dickinson poem comes to mind when I consider teaching autobiography to students with a poor self-image:

I'm nobody, who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us-don't tell!
They'd banish us, You know.
How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!

To have students feel good about themselves and express it in writing is my goal. By encouraging a better self-image, writing familiar material may foster a needed confidence. Some of the best writings stem from writing what we know best. Students too need to realize they are just as important as anyone else. By studying others the writer will have the chance to remember his own life and jot down ideas.

The easiest approach for students to study is the diary format where we record daily experience without any set plan. In the very famous *Diary of a Young Girl* the students will read Anne Frank's personal accounts as she passed through adolescence. Her thoughts and expressions were written in this form. "I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone before, and I hope you will be a great comfort and support to me." ¹ Her story is told against the back-drop of World War II. As a persecuted Jew she was held in captivity and eventually killed. Her comments on the war and people are touching.

The journal like the diary is the writer's tool to reveal more of his inner self, often leaving out events outside the dreams of the author's memory and imagination. My students will be required to keep a journal that I will read periodically and a diary for their own keeping. They will be instructed to express their thoughts and feelings. They can put down anything that is important to them. They must however write every day for at least ten minutes. Each entry must be dated. Stories, poems, and personal experiences may be recorded. It should be mentioned that the journal should please the student not the teacher. To get them started specific assignments might have to be given. For example, review the senses (sight, smell, taste, and touch) to describe an experience.

What motivates a person to write his autobiography? We need to apologize publicly, we need to rid ourselves of guilt by confessing, we want to explore, and we often just want to toot our own horns. Egotism allows the writer to assume that his life is worth sharing with others. The great impact "Ordinary People" had on theater goes proves the average person needs recognition. The growing pains young people experience can be lessened if we realize we are not alone. Even the so called famous people struggle to succeed, the rags to riches theme applies to all four-Benjamin Franklin, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, and Dick Gregory. As Benjamin Franklin said in *Poor Richard's Almanac* "nothing succeeds like success." One man even wrote because no one knew his name.

Inner city students will especially benefit from a reading of Dick Gregory's *Nigger*, and *Up From Nigger*, the sequel. The identity crises so talked about in the twentieth century will probably swallow up most of us if we do not figure out who we are or where we are going. Fortunately for Gregory a so-called monster drove him to outwit any barriers in his life. Some may call it ambition or ego but this adrenaline flow helped him win races, turn audiences on, and struggle constantly for civil rights. His school memories are poignant. As my students read the following what strong memories can they remember to write about? "The teacher thought I was stupid, couldn't spell, read or do arithmetic. Teachers never were interested in finding out that you couldn't concentrate because you were so hungry, because you hadn't had any breakfast. All you could think about was noontime, would it ever come? Maybe you could sneak into the cloakroom and steal a bite of some kid's lunch out of a coat pocket. A bite of something. Paste. You can't really make a meal of paste, or put it on bread for a sandwich, but sometimes I'd scoop a few spoonfuls out of the big paste jar in the back of the room. Pregnant people get strange tastes. I was pregnant with poverty, pregnant with dirt and pregnant with smells that made people turn away, pregnant with five other people in my bed and no daddy in the next room, and pregnant with hunger. Paste doesn't taste too bad when you're hungry." ² Students can see how something as ordinary as paste takes on new dimensions. With humor Gregory learned to fight off the ridicule of his classmates to the point where he became their hero. He once said there were so many people in his bed at night that he had to leave a book mark whenever he went to the bathroom. For many of my students who get

caught up playing the dozens game where they dump on one another's mothers this story will surprise them. It is alright for you to talk about your mother but don't let anyone else. I will have my students try to remember something happy, funny, or sad that happened to them during school and write about it.

For those teachers who work with minorities *Black Autobiography 1830-1972* is excellent. My students will get to read about slave narratives. For the black writer autobiography becomes his arsenal and battle ground. Frederick Douglass in his three books uses language as his weapon, through irony, satire, denunciation, and bitter determination to survive he attacks the racial prejudice of the day. As he once said, "The reader must not expect me to say much of my family, Genealogical trees did not flourish among slaves." ³ In the anti-slavery struggle he became a leader with his speeches and writings. Most slave narratives trace the upward movement from slave to the respected, educated citizen. Most were written to create public sentiment for the abolitionist cause. As my students read the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* I will show the two hour ACES film which supplements the historical background information.

Slave narratives were popular forms of literature in the nineteenth century, at the time of the anti-slavery crusades. The myth of the Horatio Alger hero however was first seen in Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. "From the lonely beginning on the fringes of society, the hard working and virtuous individual rises slowly yet steadily to success and social prominence; self realization is fulfilled by social arrival." ⁴ I will have my students compare the times then with today. Is it easier to get ahead now or then? What makes a man a success? Does success mean dollars and statue? Can we be poor and happy? I will lead them into discussion. What constitutes happiness? By starting with what makes me happy the students will have some direction to put these loose ends into writing.

Another good source for the teacher of minorities is *Where I'm Bound*. Here Sidonie Smith speaks of black liberation through the creative act of writing autobiography, itself. I see a different view in James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name*, a collection of essays speaking of civil rights, Black power and rebellion in the city ghettos. "The assertion of Black identity means that the author takes pride in being Black; but also maintaining and struggling to reconcile two contradictory identities; one as a Black person, the other as an American." ⁵ The qualities that make Wright's *Black Boy* great are the same ones. They include identification, alienation, and resistance. From the earliest times Black writings have mirrored white deeds. Black writings were always aimed at the white people. Militant hatred surfaces in many of their books.

I must give some consideration to the ethnic heritage of my students. The following are some of the texts published for the slower reader. I teach at Roberto Clemente and the two biographies on him are popular. These books reinforce the theme of being Black, Puerto Rican, and proud. The students like reading about Clemente because of his ethnic origin as well as his ability as a great ball player. Wheelock has put together a collection of three *Hispanic Heroes of the U.S.A.* This is the fourth in a series of four collections on Spanish heroes. Newton has a book on *Famous Puerto Ricans*, thumbnail sketches of famous men like Roberto Clemente. The last book students would enjoy is the *Picture Life of Herman Badillo*, the first Puerto Rican elected to the Congress of the United States. Although English translations of Spanish literary works are limited in number the quality is present. With so few published writings to draw from, the Puerto Rican student is encouraged to be a pioneer in writing. You might have some describe what it was like to move from another country to New Haven. When I was gathering these materials some of my bi-lingual students spotted them and begged to bring them home to read. It was frustrating that there were so few books for me to offer to them as they were quite excited about reading about their people.

Autobiographies can be a rich field of exploration for those of us interested in our students. They provide a

means for the study of the focus at work in childhood that shape and influence the personality. In *Childhood Revisited* the author purposely uses childhood experiences through adolescence. This gives the students an opportunity to realize how important younger impressions are. Kiesak's *Turning Point* is a collection of personalities all from different ethnic backgrounds. These tie in with the books I mentioned before. Students appreciate this variety. Through a collection of memories in this book we can see that children hurt, hate, tear, get frustrated, hope and get disappointed. They have many of the emotions that adults experience. The twentieth century, men and women written about here attempt to explore their pasts and figure out their beginnings. The popularity of *Roots* can be mentioned here. As teachers we can use the autobiographical approach in the study of child development, early childhood education, guidance of behavior, psychology, and home and family life. Students can help the teacher to identify with their feelings. Just as we expect the children to learn from us, we can learn from them.

The readings in Milgram's book provide supplementary material for the study of young children. Readability as well as diversity are among the several criteria used to select the thirty excerpts in this book. Many sides of childhood are shown, "You will find Lives described in rural as well as urban settings-in ghettos as well as lavish estates. Some of the individuals were brought up, within the context of the extended family, whereas others were forced to manage with one or no parent. They lived in various countries and cultures, many claiming happy childhoods-others recalling only misery." ⁶ Death, jealousy, trust, sibling rivalry, and sexual encounters are among the many experiences described by the authors. One of my favorites is Joan Baez, the folk singer, who remembers that "The major part of my childhood was spent in fighting off the terror of the bogeyman, which has been with me since my earliest memories and remains faithfully with me though now it seldom puts me out of commission, has been the fear of vomiting." ⁷ The recent movie "Halloween" makes me not want to remember anything about the ever present bogeyman. That is a very real fear for children. I will use her story to elicit responses from my students on what do they recall as their most frightening experience. I recall many nightmares after I went to see "The Fall of the House of Usher" which my parents forbade me to see. It is easier for students to get excited about the extraordinary in life. Each person gives his personal perception of his childhood; however, the subjectivity of these insights is also their strength, because it is important what the individual wishes to tell. Be prepared for a variety of childhood recollections.

"How to Get Your Class Writing"

Working with these selections may kindle an interest in your students to write the biography of a parent, brother or sister. This would arouse thoughts of early childhood relationships. Teaching someone to write is a personal experience. Let your reader know through your writings that your subject is someone special. To accomplish this bear in mind the following: Why are you writing this story? Why is the subject worth writing about? Why would your reader want to read your material? As you reread your story does it make sense?

To help your students with this task help them decide on the subject matter and stick to it. Writing effectively is not easy to do so encourage your students to keep at it. If they write about themselves have them make other characters as important as they made themselves. Get in the practice of reading your work aloud. Revise, Rewrite. Make a first draft knowing you are going to go over it to improve it. To begin with imitating others helps novices. But then to be yourself you have to learn to write naturally, which may take many practices. There is no real short cut to good writing. Be aware of your own feelings. You have as much to say as anyone else. Discuss finding a voice with your students. Start off with simple vocabulary. Be clear and precise. Keep the journalism questions in mind; who? what? when? where? how? why? Do not take for granted that the reader knows what you do. Experiment with feelings as they are a key to creative writing. Be honest in your descriptions. Later on in the revisions you can use the thesaurus to sharpen your piece.

Part of learning to write is learning to turn the rough draft into a polished product through rewriting. To revive successfully allow some time to pass before your next attempt. Pretend someone else did the writing and put yourself in the reader's position. Is everything clear, developed, and well organized? If not, make the necessary changes. As you reread the paper aloud what sounds awkward? Sometimes by reading your paper backwards you are better able to identify spelling errors, faulty punctuation, and ungrammatical sentences. Are you pleased with what you have written? Be honest. As you revise if you did not say the best word choice this is your chance to change it.

To encourage student writing remind them that their key is to select words that will carry their message clearly. For example, consider the diversity of the word "born." Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin; Elsa, the lioness cub, was born free; Ron Kovic, the Vietnam hero, was born on the Fourth of July; some are born-again Christians, and Dulcinea, in "Man of la Mancha," was born on a dung heap. Good word usage is important. The product must be revised and repolished many times. My experience has been that most students consider proof reading and rewriting a form of punishment. Positive reinforcement and a velvet mallet usually work!

Students will need time to discuss some of the reasons not to write an autobiographical sketch-boring, no time, hate English, nothing interesting ever happened, or if something did, it is not to be shared. When the pros and cons are discussed, we can commence. Time spent in considering your past before writing about it will recall to your mind people, things, incidents that will make the eventual writing easier. Refer to the activity pages at the end for suggestions in motivational warm-ups. "The principal weakness of amateur writing is in not presenting enough particulars to make the subject clear, convincing, and interesting." ⁸ To overcome an initial fear of writing some students may want to try writing about some *one* close to them. Simple listing of facts, dates, events, places and individuals may help students to remember pertinent information.

In creative writing accuracy and originality in descriptions are basic. The more you think about something or someone the better you are able to describe more of the aspects. Have your students write about familiar objects. They can practice in expanding the concepts of ordinary by expressing them in a fresh, unspoiled way. Originality in writing turns something usually dull into something creative, start with descriptions of ordinary things: shoes, rocks, toothpaste. Compare the ways we eat corn on the cob, watermelon, tatty, and cotton candy with the usual cereal, toast, hamburger, and hot chocolate.

Encourage your students to use exact words. General words too often blur a sharp picture. By reviewing the figures of speech concentrate on similes and metaphors. Imaginative comparisons make ordinary things appear quite differently. Use the simile as a direct comparison. It is a literary device which helps a reader better understand what you are trying to say. The metaphor is the opposite, an implied or an indirect comparison. After you review with students what clichés are, try to avoid than. These once effective expressions are worn out by overuse.

In creative writing we hope to challenge student thinking, stimulate their senses, engage their imaginations, address their interests, touch their emotions, tap their personal experiences, and encourage and respect their efforts. As we look at the various writing forms—paragraph, story, poem, prayer, spell, tall tale, and newspaper ad-keep in mind that the paragraph is a key to good writing. The main idea is usually stated in the topic sentence.

The rest of the paragraph proves the main idea. A well done paragraph makes the reader see that the main

idea is true. There are several kinds of paragraphs; description, exploration, narration, opinion, feeling, fantasy, imagination, sensory perception and dreams. Writing becomes a fun way of communicating ideas with others.

Autobiography as a literary genre has the underlying principle of scrutiny of self. We have to do our own research and draw from our own experiences.

Through introspection and self awareness autobiography allows us to see separate occurrences even early in life as moving toward and completing a pattern finally achieved later in life. When I was a child I spoke as a child . . . but when I grew up I threw away those childish things. (Corinthians I Chapt. 13 verse 11) The purpose of autobiography by definition is to express and create subjective awareness. "To thine own self be true."(Hamlet) My students will be given the chance to write about themselves. To help them achieve this goal several readings from the following selections will inspire them.

My students will read *Modern Short Biographies*. Having used this collection before I know their favorite story is "Walt Disney." Is it surprising when we all like to be entertained? Just as adults reminisce children do too. They can remember spending Sundays watching the "Wonderful World of Color." Even some of my problem students have softened when we talk about Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. The appeal of Disneyland or World had not lessened. Who could forget some of the classics; Bambi, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Lady and the Tramp, and 1001 Dalmatians?

The people in Christ's book are as different as people can be. "They include both men and women, the famous and the not so famous. They include people of many races, religions, and their ideas about life. They include Presidents, and tennis players, mayors, and doctors, scientists, and athletes. All are Americans who made contributions to this country." ⁹ More important it includes the biographical sketch of Walt Disney, a hero. For all of his fame he explains, "the dictionary is the only place where success comes before work."(p.216) After reading his story take time to discuss some of the common experiences students remember. What feelings did we all share? What senses come to mind? Were there any certain smells, sounds, tastes, or sights that you especially recall?

For specific writing assignments *Real Stories* ends each lesson with "Expressing Yourself" and "Write Now." Here the students are challenged to think carefully about different aspects of the article and put their ideas on paper. This book is a collection of twenty five reading selections from recent newspapers. The high interest and low vocabulary make it easy to work with. The themes are funny, and provocative.

For a general introduction to biographies Kiesak's *Turning Point* is great. The third grade reading level is hidden behind more sophisticated format. Each of the twenty eight stories is built around the most exciting event in the life of the subject. Each story deals with a person who has overcome great obstacles in life. My students with reading handicaps can relate to the characters in this book who have had their own failures. Each story serves as a model for the students and helps to motivate them to overcome their own difficulties. The study aids are also designed to enable students to experience success. These combine to give students the important motivation needed to master the reading skills they have missed. The selections have wide audience appeal. These glimpses into the lives of current day Americans are appealing. Refer to the activity sheets for specific ways in which your students can approach writing.

As teachers we set an example for students each day. It is natural for them to imitate and role play. Just as I am asking my students to write personal commentaries I think in all fairness to them I will present a sample of how I would write my autobiography with specific passages for them to read. My life story would be compared

to this poem for starters:

I shall be older than this one day.
I shall think myself young when I remember.
Nothing can stop
the slow change of masks my face must wear,
one following one.
These gloves my hands have put on,
the pleated skin, patterned by
the pale tracings of my days . . .
These are not my hands!
And yet, these gloves do not come off!
I shall wear older ones tomorrow,
till, glove after glove,
and mask after mask,
I am buried beneath
the baggage of Old Woman.
Oh, then,
shall I drop them off,
Unbutton the sagging, misshapen apparel of age,
and run, naked and young, into Eternity! ¹⁰

One approach I would take would be to think back to when my dreams began. Through nostalgia I can stroll

down memory lane. Once upon a time there was a land of laughing children and confident grownups called America the Beautiful, In rosy retrospect in that simpler country the Hollywood of the stare and the golden voice of radio, innocent comic books, funny papers and the big bands all blared out a message of cockeyed optimism. It was a time of Mickey Mouse watches and Lionel trains, of Howdy Doody and Buffalo Bob Smith, of Fibber McGee and Molly, and of the reassuring "Saturday Evening Post" every Thursday. We must look for it now only on late-nite television for it is no more than a dream remembered, an America gone with the wind . .

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Webster has defined nostalgia as a "wistful or excessively sentimental, sometimes abnormal yearning for a return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition." (p. 10003)

Nostalgia is a psychological time machine that transplants me to the good old days of another era. Once there, I will find that it is a state of mind, oblivious to actual or imagined barriers. For me it is a pleasant stroll through yesteryear, a simple, less turbulent past.

The fact is that all times are tough for the people who must live through them, and glow golden only for those who survive them, or simply imagine them. Perhaps nostalgia is offering only a temporary relief from the discomforts of the real world, but it is also offering many Americans and me a glimpse of the nation's past.

Did the good old days really exist? Archie Bunker seems to think those were the days. My autobiography would be my escape vehicle. When my todays are too much to handle I can remember when. Even though some of my past was not pleasant through my imagination the yesterdays can appear great. Going through old photo albums and attics are great ways to remember and initiate story lines for students. Didn't Kodak and the Bell system make a fortune toying with our sentiments? After students realize that I did not grow up in the dark ages we can discuss some of the possibilities for them to consider. What makes them unique from their classmates? Why would my brief excerpt appear humorous to them? What will their younger brothers and sisters think in ten years when they read about the 1970's? How is their childhood memories different from those of their parents, or is there a difference?

Remember only you can write your autobiography.

Sample Activities

Creative Writing Through Puppetry

There is an ancient Chinese proverb:

I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand

Puppetry is a fun way to involve students. It can be an outlet for problem students. Through puppets students can empathize with others. What seems pretend can often harbor real thoughts and feelings especially in the adolescent years. Students can overcome shyness, gain confidence, acceptance, and a feeling of security, success, and cooperation in group interactions. It is a novel way to what could and often has been a turn off- Biographies-Oh, do we have to? Personally I used to dread reading them. Knowing this I want to give my students every opportunity to get excited about life stories which I see as an adult are filled with possibilities. What could be more fascinating than people? Ultimately I want my students to write creative dramatics: including antecedent action, initial incident, exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement, and finis.

After we have read numerous biographical selections mentioned before each student is to pick out a favorite person whom they would like to imitate. They will be taught how to make a simple hand puppet from old gloves, mittens, felt, glue. A couple of students will be assigned to build a stage from a large box and a desk blotter. This back drop allows several changes of scenery to be used.

Each student is to try writing, alone or in pairs, a script. They are to use quotes and passages from the selection read. Remind them of the effectiveness of humor. The puppets in turn can only come to life if you give them voice, movement, appearance, and personality.

During the actual writing remind them to keep the action and dialogue simple, clear, and easy to follow just as we reviewed in the section on "How to Write." A short introduction by a narrator may be followed by a logical development of the action and dialogue. Finally a clear ending which follows closely on the climax is next. Have the students take turns introducing their puppets, telling their names in puppet voices, as they see, them moving. Puppet voices should be exaggerated. Pick a voice which you think would match the character of your puppet: high, low, fast, slow, whisper, hoarse, growling, sweet, squeaky, deep, choppy, yawning, chipper. In characterizing your person think of their point of view, taste in clothes, taste in food, humor, friends, interests, job, personal history, and famous key phrases. Then practice puppet movements; side to side; up and down; forward and back; and in circles.

To demonstrate to my students I have composed this sample skit with puppets.

"Julia Child in Take Human Bites"

Chef-in a poor French accent-Bonjour la classe.

Je suis la galloping gourmet (as she rides in on a hobby horse)

Today we are going to make soup du jour-blowing a kiss at her recipe.

We will make it ala carte-she yells out I don't care what you bring it out on.

Chef Julia looks at her cook book through her magnifying glass.

(note simple props are used to effect exaggeration)

Out loud she reads and motions:

1. chop meat-literally she uses karate

2. pinch of salt-ouch!
3. 1 cup of water-she throws the cup in too
4. whip egg whites-uses white spray paint to color brown eggs
5. 1 rabbit-bugs bunny puppet conveniently appears exclaiming "THAT'S ALL FOLKS"
6. Voila! she sprays lysol—such aroma.

Julia Child kissing her finger tips says mmmm think the French accent should be on Liptons.

Fini

Having used puppetry before I am always amazed at the imaginative skits students write. They genuinely get excited and look forward to any assigned projects. In fact it works so much that it is difficult to then move on to English drill work. Do we have to?

Dial a Job

The Junior High School age is ideal for thinking about the future. To plan for a career we must start early. Once we begin working it is usually for a long time so it better be a choice well thought out. Review value structure with your students. What is most important to you? Do you want an exciting job with constant change and many challenges, financial security, personal freedom, pleasure, job satisfaction in a job well done, political power, social service, creativity, or a combination of some of these? As we read the selections mentioned in this unit what are some of the jobs and are those people happy? What education and training are required to become some of the people we read about? How much money do you want to make? Consider all the aspects of job selection; what will be your responsibilities, what benefits does it offer, can you get ahead in that company, what are the working conditions, the hours, the salary, and do you have to travel much? Think about your priorities. Does it make any difference if you are happy?

Have each student select a possible career. Let them read and study someone in that field. Give students a sample of a resume.

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE PRESENT AND WORK BACK

PROFESSIONAL STATUS—EX. CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

EDUCATION—MOST RECENT AND WORK BACK

PERSONAL—BIRTHDATE, MARITAL STATUS, HEALTH, HOBBIES, INTERESTS

REFERENCES—UPON REQUEST

To practice a variation of writing have students fill out a resume as if they would be applying for a summer job as many do. Since so many do not know what they would qualify for have them evaluate themselves first. What abilities do they possess? What do they like to do? Do they want to work outdoors in summer? Make up a personality traits chart and see which ones apply to them.

Have a student make a cardboard dial similar to a giant telephone. Alphabetically jobs will be listed. (For example, A-artist, architect, actor, astronaut) You can cross reference it too.(For example, Norman Rockwell listed under A and R) When you dial a job or a personality there is a report filed already which has been assigned previously.

To encourage an interest in ethnic origins have students select representatives of certain nationalities and study them. They can write menus, dress dolls in native costumes, and keep scrap books on that country.

The best push for career education is field trips. Local businesses are more than willing to accommodate tour groups. Merrill Lynch, Colonial Bank and the New Haven Register schedule tours regularly. The excitement from a trip is an easy motivator for some writing activities.

To Write the Unwritable Wrong

Teaching autobiographies to your students need not be an impossible dream. Students with poor self-images are shocked when someone is truly interested in learning about their life. Autobiography allows them the chance to share themselves with others. I am somebody, who are you?

My students will step into a make believe time machine. Here they will brainstorm together but jet down information which is pertinent to them. Consider these questions for starters:

1. Who are your favorite people?
2. What was the most important thing to happen to you?
3. What are your favorite hobbies and interests?
4. What books, movies, and television shows do you like?
5. What do you dream about?
6. What are your likes and dislikes?
7. What makes you happy and sad?

From this gathering of information have students do a time line where they can better order the sequence of events.

Then design a panorama of three scenes from their life. The panorama can take the form of a collage, three dimensional cut out, drawing, painting, or photography. Welcome any other creative suggestions.

My students will review their journals and diaries previously assigned and their time lines to gather information necessary to begin writing. Review the section on "How to Write." Since my goal is creative writing through autobiography I will be flexible. They will be given numerous suggestions and samples of what they could do. But they will be given the chance in a non-threatening atmosphere to be original. The finished product will be handed in only after we have had a session on how to make book jackets and which captions and photographs to include.

As a culminating activity the class will do a well hanging of burlap, felt, and bright colored yarns. Each student is to be given a standard size rectangle which they can design. For suggestions they can do hand prints, athletic scenes, self-portraits, zodiac signs, birthdays, and personality traits like the funniest, the best athlete, the most ordinary, the shyest and so forth. Your will and prophecy are up to you.

Books for Classroom Library

Bromberg, Chakeres, Katz *Real Stories* New York: Globe Book Co. 1979.

The twenty five reading selections based on recent newspaper articles use high interest and low vocabulary.

Christ, Henry *Modern Short Biographies* New York: Globe Book 1970.

Each selection can be handled in one class period.

Condos, Paulette *Write On " A Collection of 70 Creative Writing Ideas for Teachers"* California: Educational Insights Inc. 1974.

Kiesak, Kenneth *Turning Point " A Collection of Short Biographies"* New York: Globe Book 1973.

Although the reading level ranges from 2 to 3.5 the format is more sophisticated.

Notes

1. Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl*, p.1.
2. Gregory, Dick. *Nigger*, p, 30.
3. Butterfield, Stephen. *Black Autobiographies*, (Life and Times) p.1..
4. Smith, Sidonie. *Where I'm Bound*, p. 30.
5. Butterfield, Op cit, p.94.
6. Milgram, Joel. *Childhood Revisited*, p.18.
7. Ibid. p. 17.
8. Dixon, Janice. *Preserving Your Past*, p.60.

9. Christ, Henry. *Modern Short Biographies*, p.1.
10. Anglund, Joan. *A Cup of Sun*, p.59.
11. "Nostalgia" *Newsweek* , 28 December 1970, p.34.

Bibliography for Students

Alexander, Rae Young *and Black in America* New York: Random House 1970.

From the juvenile section this book has dramatic accounts of Malcolm X,

Richard Wright, Frederick Douglass to name a few.

Allyn, Paul *The Picture Life of Herman Badillo* New York: Franklin Watts Inc. 1972.

He is the first Puerto Rican ever elected to congress.

Bradford, Sarah *Harriet Tubman "The Moses of Her People"* New Jersey: Citadel Press 1961.

This is a slave narrative from a woman's point of view.

Brondfield, Jerry *Roberto Clemente Pride of the Pirates* Illinois: Garrard Pub. Co. 1976.

Pages 16-27 emphasize the importance of being Black, proud, and Puerto Rican.

Douglass, Frederick *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University 1960.

This is a must, a true classical slave narrative.

Frank, Anne *The Diary of a Young Girl* New York: Doubleday & Co. 1967.

This is a touching true story for all ages to enjoy.

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin New York: Doubleday & Co., 1939.

This manual of Franklin's success story depicts the American Way-rags to riches. This should be required reading.

Gaines, Ernest *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* New York: Bantam Books 1975.

This follows the traditional pattern of the slave narrative. This book is written from actual taped interviews.

Gregory, Dick *Nigger and Up From Nigger* New York: Stein & Bay Co. 1976.

The original and the sequel are excellent! Poignant statement is made about our times.

Haley, Alex *Roots* New Jersey: Doubleday Inc. 1976.

This is too difficult for my remedial readers but a viewing of the movie might help.

Hughes, Langston *Famous American Negroes* New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1954.

This collection can be found in the New Haven Public Library. It is taken from a set of 64 books on job related biographies.

Keller, Helen *The Story of My Life* New Jersey: Doubleday & Co. 1954.

This classic will be assigned to all of my students.

Newton, Clarke *Famous Puerto Ricans* New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co, 1975.

Pages 41-54 have a thumbnail sketch of Roberto Clemente.

Olson, James *Roberto Clemente The Great One* Minnesota: Creative Education 1974.

This third grade reader has large print and low vocabulary.

Twain, Mark *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* ed. Chas, Neider New York: Harper Bros. 1959.

Or is this really Samuel Clemens?

Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery* New York: Doubleday & Co. 1901.

This slave narrative resembles the success story of Benjamin Franklin where business monitored his life.

Wheelock, Warren and Rocky Maynes *Hispanic Heroes of the U.S.A.* Minnesota: Dodd, Mead, & Co, 1974.

This is the fourth of a series on Spanish heroes in golf, football, and baseball.

Bibliography for Teachers

Baggell, Miriam *All in a Day's Work* New York: Globe Co, 1974.

These are true stories about job related problems.

Bayne, Sarah *Helping Kids Write* Cambridge: Educators Pub., Service 1980.

This is a practical guide for teaching 5th through 8th graders how to express themselves in writing.

Butterfield, Stephen *Black Autobiographies* Amherst: U. Mass Press, 1974.

From this historical view of Black writings one can trace their similarities.

Dixon, Janice and Dora Flack *Preserving Your Past* New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977.

This book was a great help in doing this unit.

Dodd, Anne *Write Now !* New York: Globe Book Co, Inc, 1973.

These insights into creative writing allow you to relax, be yourself, and experience your own feelings as you try to put them on paper.

Johnson, Eric *Life Into Language* New York: Bantam Books 1976.

You will read and look, think and discuss, and think and write. This anthology of pictures, prose and poetry is designed to stimulate students to write.

Milgram, Joel and Dorothy Sciarra *Childhood Revisited* New York: MacMillan Pub, Co, 1974.

This book was my favorite in doing this unit. It can be found at Buley Library, S.C.S.C.

"Nostalgia" *Newsweek*, 28 December 1970, pp.34-38.

Potter, Robert *Writing Sense* New York: Globe Book Co. Inc. 1975.

Why is writing so hard? This book has a single purpose; to help you become a better writer. Three things are necessary for good writing; talent, training, and practice. Your writing will be just as good as you really want it to be. This book can be used as a remedial text for the slow to average high school student.

Sohn, David *Pictures for Writing and Stop, Look, and Write* New York: Bantam Books 1969.

Bantam Books 1969.

This book teaches the student to see life through the perceptive eye of the photographer and the writer. Using as examples the writing of William Faulkner, Somerset Maugham, and James Joyce, the student is exposed to the best of modern writing and photography. This is a visual approach to composition based on the principle that good writing depends on accurate and keen observation.

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