



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

Student Autobiography: An Approach Through Journal Writing

Guide for Curriculum Unit 82.02.07
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As the title infers, my approach to this unit concentrates on autobiographical writings by students. The students I plan to use this unit with are developmental level ninth graders. The “cluster” to which these students belong groups ninth graders as to their reading level upon entering Hillhouse High School. My classes are between the reading levels of grades 4.5-5.4. From my past experience, these are students who readily read orally and for whom writing is synonymous with torture. My goal for the past two years has been to have students write in journal form using the writing process of notes, rough draft, revision and final draft. In this unit, I have devised a method of incorporating autobiographical reading and writing sessions with my journal unit techniques. My unit will begin in September and continue throughout the school year resulting in the accumulation of a variety of student writings which are filed and stored in the classroom. The final goal of this unit is for each student to produce a bound collection of autobiographical writings together with art work, photographs, souvenir items and taped interviews. My methods are based on the linguistic approach to language study which incorporates the inductive method of inquiry. The class proceeds in a structured manner through the following phases in relation to the study of autobiography.

1. defining 2. questioning 3. observing 4. classifying 5. generalizing 6. verifying 7. revising 8. completing

This is a student-centered approach. The emphasis is on students learning a step-by-step process of how to learn rather than the accumulation of teacher-centered facts. The responsibility to learn is focused on the student becoming involved in the processes of writing, small group discussion and editing of pieces written. This process also allows and encourages student conversation throughout the writing process. Small group methods are used to reinforce the idea that an on-going process is being learned as students develop a writing “voice” from their spoken one. The final segment of the unit incorporates the Wilderness School’s “cultural journalism” course which investigates the students’ home and city environment. These writings and reports will be included in the final product, an autobiographical portfolio. Due to the costs involved in using Wilderness School personnel, students will be responsible for fund-raising to partially cover those costs. This unit is not for every teacher. But if you are as frustrated as I was with the failure of traditional methods of teaching writing skills, then this unit might be for you.

(Recommended for 9th-12th grades English 1-4 (developmental) and 9th-12th grades English 1-4 (basic))

Key Words

Reading Instruction Autobiography Writing

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