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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1988 Volume III: Autobiography in America

I Am...

Guide for Curriculum Unit 88.03.04
by Bill Coden

I have observed an alarming lack of sense of self-worth and an amazing passivity among some of my students. They do not feel that they can affect change, take charge, overcome.

My unit will focus on journal writing, both personal and as a record of our readings. The journals will be the repositories of the raw material for later public writing. The readings, grouped around the theme of confronting and overcoming problems, will be excerpted from autobiographies and will include fiction, poetry, and journal entries. It is my expectation that the focus on self will enable students to raise self-esteem; to see themselves as agents of change in their own lives; to realize the connections between their past and present and how these connections can influence the future.

Students will keep journals, which will be viewed as records of daily lives. My student journal-keepers will preserve memories; express, confront, and claim feelings; be reminded of their importance; see instances of change in their lives and behavior. These writings will be private, though some entries may serve as the basis for public writing. Reading logs will contain reactions to our readings and discussions. Writing assignments will grow out of our discussions, for the most part.

(Recommended for Remedial English classes, grade 8.)

Key Words

Autobiography Reading Instruction Writing Journals

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