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

Knowledge of Self Through the Study of Autobiography/Biography

Guide for Curriculum Unit 88.03.09
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This unit is written for high school students. The readings and activities presented here are for college or general level freshman, sophomores and juniors. It can be adapted to suit any reading or grade level. The unit is designed to take a semester. Aspects of the unit can be used for whatever time period the teacher chooses. Biography and autobiography are important genres for adolescents to learn more about and to become more comfortable working on. The emotional, psychological, philosophical and social issues that adolescents face are stressful for any adult, but can be devastating to a teenager. Knowledge of who they are and what their potential can be is vitally important to their survival.

Learning about oneself is a life-long process, as we all know; it can begin in earnest in high school. New Haven high school seniors are required to write an autobiographical sketch as part of their postsecondary school package. After three years of helping seniors to write their autobiographical sketches, it is clear that more thorough instruction must be done to get students past, "I was born...." Self-exploratory units of reading and writing exercises should be given to freshmen, sophomores and juniors, so that by their senior year an autobiographical sketch is, for them, "a piece of cake."

(Recommended for English I classes, grade 9; English II classes, grade 10; English III classes, grade 11; and English IV classes, grade 12)

Key Words

Ethnicity General Autobiographies Ethnic Autobiography Reading Instruction

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