

## LIFE WRITING UNIT PLANS

7/23/2008

### Lesson Plan – Preface:

This lesson plan is intended to be used with my 11<sup>th</sup> grade AP Language and Composition class. My primary objective is to teach writing with purpose and clarity and appreciation of the written word to accelerated students. Before 11<sup>th</sup> grade, our students primarily have studied literature but are not as familiar with non-fiction works and other types of writing; thus much time and focus is given to studying how language communicates levels of meaning and how writers use language to create meaning and effect. The hope is that students will become confident and close readers and effective communicators and persuasive writers. In addition to the College Board's requirements of an AP Language and Composition course, the school's curriculum demands that 11<sup>th</sup> grade English be a survey of American Literature. The AP class uses *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Shorter Sixth Edition* and *The Riverside Reader* as primary textbooks with additional works of non-fiction and fiction being supplied by the teacher and the students. (Thus a majority of the literature and poetry is American; though the essays and editorials, etc. may be from other countries).

This unit might be introduced some time during the first quarter before students write the first major out of class essay which is typically a narrative essay. Each year I think in terms of an overall thread to tie ideas and units together. I see this as part of a year where we are thinking of the multiple meanings and versions of "truth". In this unit of Life Writing the idea would be to tie truth to memory and imagination.

### **Life Writing: Narrators and Readers: When Memory and Imagination Meet**

#### **Unit Goals: (2-3 weeks)**

- Explore several examples of Life Writing (memoir, autobiography, personal essay) with a particular focus on Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* as well as several excerpts from other authors' works.
- Independent reading of an autobiography or memoir from approved list
- Examine the differences between stylistic devices of Life Writing and its function as it relates to fiction and its method of revealing truths
- Examination of how language functions in a piece to convey the tone, meaning, function, and texture through written and oral story-telling
- A revised and polished piece of student narrative work that incorporates the elements of life writing.
- Read *One Writer's Beginnings*

**Specific Instructional Objectives**

- distinguish elements of life writing
- discussion and exploration of fictional elements as they overlap with life writing
- discovery of the meanings of truth and the ways memory are shaped
- comprehension of how the writer deliberately chooses detail, images, memory for purpose particularly in *One Writer's Beginnings*
- out of class reading of an autobiography or memoir as a member of a group who will present the work to the class explaining the features of life writing in the work.
- comparison of an actual event with a remembered or reinterpreted way of seeing it (for use with "Where Is The Voice Coming From?")
- brainstorm, write, revise, peer edit, and re-write a personal life writing (narrative) essay

**Strategies:**

- **Lesson 1:** Meanings of words: select a passage from Welty's *OWB* possibly first page (839) and isolate certain words (students will not have read the book or excerpts prior to this exercise). "grandfather clock... midnight...baby brother...eclipses....magnifying glass" for example and have students free write associations with each word for a few minutes. Then read aloud the passage allowing students afterwards to discuss how their associations with the words beforehand affected (interacted) with the text. Next hand out the entire passage allowing students to work with a partner on a close reading and annotation of the pages. This would be followed by class discussion.
- **Lesson 2:** Features of Life Writing discussion/ lecture/ group discussion; students put into groups of no more than 4-5 depending on class size to read independently but then work together on presentation of a work of memoir from the approved list. This group discussion will be due the Tuesday following the final draft of the paper.
- **Lesson 3:** Discussion of narrative and descriptive writing; using details to evoke impression Welty's *OWB* (908-910); homework response journal: Imagining your parents as children. Add a narrative essay from *Riverside Reader*.
- **Lesson 4:** Interviewing techniques with the objective being to interview a family member about an object that has meaning to your family history, values, or sense of identity. Craft the interview questions on SMARTboard as a class; have class create rubric for grading; due on day 6 (after a weekend given to complete interview assignment).
- **Lesson 5:** Evaluating language: select a passage from another part of *OWB* to evaluate for tone, word choice, rhythm, texture, sensory perceptions, imagery, figurate language, layers of truth, meaning, and memory. Groups craft multiple choice questions based on the passage.
- **Lesson 6:** Discussion of interviews: Prewriting the life writing essay; brainstorming, free writing, a first draft in class; homework: "Where is the Voice Coming From?"

- **Lesson 7:** Discussion of voice in “Where is the Voice Coming From?” Read “Incident”. Discuss perception of a story in shaping of it; discuss personal narrative and truth in creating life writing essay
- **Lesson 8:** Revision and reading each others rough drafts. Peer editors write a response to their partners’ rough draft explaining what they saw in their partners’ essay. Writers must then evaluate whether or not they effectively communicated the story (the truth) they wanted to tell and then revise deliberately to achieve that truth
- **Lesson 9:** Submission of finished paper; wrap up of discussion of *OWB*; Read excerpts from other memoirs
- **Lesson 10:** (probably at least one week later): Group presentations of assigned autobiographies/memoirs.

**Assessment:**

- Selected passages from Welty’s for close reading and multiple choice testing
- Blind passage from a memoir for multiple choice reading comprehension testing
- A transcript of an interview with a family member which will be graded according to a rubric and a set of interview questions
- A personal narrative life writing essay, typed, double spaced, that employs a strong sense of voice, content, meaning, word choice, structure, and mechanics.
- Group lead discussion (to be graded as a participation grade) on selected autobiographies, memoirs, etc.

**Possible texts or excerpts from texts to use with this unit:**

*The Autobiography*- Ben Franklin

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*- Alex Haley

*The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass*-Frederick Douglass

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*-Maya Angelou

*Pentimento*-Lillian Hellman

*Landscapes from the Heart*-Elizabeth Spencer

*Dust Tracks on the Road*-Zora Neale Hurston ( with particular focus on “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” maybe even paired with Welty’s “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” to compare voice

Perhaps even *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frye might offer interesting insights

\* students studied *Black Boy* by Richard Wright in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but could still be reviewed.

Additionally: several essays from *The Riverside Reader* would be included as well as short stories: “Where Is the Voice Coming From?”

Poetry that could be used:

“Incident”- Countee Cullen

“Those Winter Sundays” – Robert Hayden

“My Papa’s Waltz” – Theodore Roethke

“Daddy” –Sylvia Plath