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Sharing our Stories: A Personal Narrative Literacy Curriculum for Grades 3-5

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Sharing our Stories:

A Personal Narrative Literacy Curriculum for Grades 3-5

By

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Abstract

Sharing our Stories: A Personal Narrative Literacy Curriculum for Grades 3-5

Casey Adler

This thesis began out of my curiosity about the ways to set up a classroom to best support growing readers and writers. As my exploration into literacy continued, I decided to create a personal narrative unit with several foundational literacy skills, strategies, and practices for students to develop. With variety, authenticity, and modeling as the key pillars in planning, alignment to skills and standards will be embedded in genuine literacy experiences. The choice to engage in a genre study of personal narrative was due to its developmental appropriateness, potential for community building, and opportunity to share a range of stories. Using resources from *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing* (Davis & Hill, 2003), *Classrooms that Work: They Can All Read and Write* (Cunningham & Allington, 2016), and *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: Grades PreK-8* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011) as foundations, an adaptable, six-week curriculum is suggested.

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Rationale

Introduction

When I began planning for this thesis, I was a fourth-grade teacher at an independent school in East Harlem. I was given a lot of autonomy in planning curriculum, but I was lacking a cohesive literacy curriculum or a scope and sequence of skills. After taking *Teaching Literacy in the Elementary Grades*, I was inspired to begin restructuring the ways I taught literature, word study, and writing. As I taught the rest of that year, I applied what I could to connect the various elements of our literacy program and prepare my students for fifth grade. When my teaching placement changed, so did my original intent, but I continued to be curious about the ways to set up a classroom to best support growing readers and writers.

What are the most important literacy skills, strategies, and practices students should be developing and what is the proper order in which to teach them? How are third-grade skills built on in fourth grade and then in fifth? How can teachers work together to ensure a progression of these practices? How can you align to these skills and standards yet keep the authenticity and depth of texts that students deserve? At this point in my experience, I had not witnessed a teaching model that answered my questions. I was left with the Common Core, the pitfalls of standardized testing, the bleak and divisive news, and the opinion of college classmates who did not understand why I would even want to be a teacher. This is one of the many reasons I am so grateful to Bank Street and the community of teachers I have met over the last five years. Within this community, if you know where to look and what “news” to avoid, there are people who have the answers, or are willing to explore them with you.

One of my main takeaways from the *Foundations of Modern Education* course was that there has been and will continue to be a wide range of opinions and debates on the best way to teach. Therefore, the purpose of this project is not to survey these texts, but instead to gather information and create a curriculum inspired by some of the wonderful work I have come across so far. The primary texts that have guided my journey are *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing* (Davis & Hill, 2003), *Classrooms that Work: They Can All Read and Write* (Cunningham & Allington, 2016), and *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: Grades PreK-8* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Along with the various settings I have taught in, the teachers I have learned from, and the ever-expanding resources available online, I am beginning to find answers to my questions.

Developing a Genre Study

Ever since being introduced to these core texts, I have been simultaneously overwhelmed by the possibilities and suggestions and reassured by the commonsense recommendations. The beginning of Cunningham and Allington (2016) delves into effective teachers and successful schools. There are several main takeaways useful for my planning of this curriculum and for framing my mindset as a teacher. One idea, a concept repeated from the very first page, is the importance of having a “balanced,” and “comprehensive” literacy instruction. They define this as “authentic reading and writing are combined with explicit skills instruction. Daily instruction includes some whole-class teaching, some one-to-one conferences, and both teacher-led and collaborative groupings” (Cunningham & Allington, 2016, p. vii). This all-encompassing idea is

appealing and makes sense because all of the students that I have worked with could benefit from a combination of explicit skill instruction and authentic reading and writing experiences, not just one or the other. On a similar note, they found that effective classrooms were ones where students were learning to read, write, and communicate in environments where there was meaning, purpose, and higher-level thinking within activities. The “explicit skill instruction” meant that students were being shown clear strategies and coached on how to use them while reading and writing. But to keep it authentic meant that it was not just skills, but open-ending questions and problem solving. A key phrase that stood out to me was that they do not recommend one program that is a “magic bullet,” but rather to use a variety of formats and a variety of materials in order to embed skill instruction within authentic literacy experiences.

This envisioned curriculum for an initial literacy unit based around personal narrative seeks to fulfill this range of grouping, texts, and skills. In order to best meet this variety, this has been planned around a classroom that has large blocks for literature and writing each day, with the addition of independent reading time. Although the curriculum that follows focuses on reading literature and writing, there would be time in the day for many other literacy activities not discussed, for example: writing about reading, word study, reading informational texts, and independent reading. Many of these are intertwined both in school schedules and curriculum. While I will not go into detail about word study, since that is not a main standard I chose to emphasize in this plan, it would be occurring in daily work. Word study would be reinforced in the close reading of texts and the push for students to identify and record “spicy” words that stand out in stories that are unique or with which they may be less familiar (Baumann, Ware, & Edwards,

2007). Additionally, this was planned with the assumption that the unit begins a couple of weeks into the school year when students are familiar with classroom routines and procedures so that the focus may be on the content, and not on teaching systems.

In planning for reading instruction, there will be a combination of whole-group read-alouds and discussions, along with small-group, and individual conferences. Depending on the preferences of the school and teacher, small-group reading instruction could take place as guided reading or as literature circles, or a combination. These various groupings support the main standards, discussed below, as well as the “behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support” from Fountas and Pinnell (2011). These “behaviors and understandings” become the goals of how to support and assess students’ thinking “within, beyond, and about a text” during reading processes before, during, and after reading a text. If the Common Core standards and Fountas and Pinnell (2011) serve as a framework for the larger objectives, than the recommendations within Cunningham and Allington (2016) and Davis and Hill (2003) help to supply more specific mini-lessons and activities to achieve these goals. For example, this unit employs think-alouds, story maps, finding evidence for themes/morals/lessons learned, and using WH questions to support comprehension (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). The discussions that will take place during this unit will “give students opportunities to share their own ideas, to express their own meanings, and to contribute to deeper understandings. Conversation must be genuine” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011, p. 19). It is crucial to engage students in meaningful discussions for several reasons. In reviewing research about literature discussions, Pittman and Honchell (2014) discuss that not only do they allow for students’ voices to be heard, but they create opportunities to think critically about the

texts, to reflect and make connections, which expands their literacy learning. As students contribute to class understanding, they also deepen their own. Additionally, the conversations that occur during literature will lead into and support their work as writers.

Although Davis and Hill (2003) did not have a chapter on teaching a personal narrative unit, the suggestions in the “First Cycle: From Writing Idea to Notebook Entry,” “Poetry Study,” and “Picture Book Study” served as guides. Within these valuable chapters, there were more mini-lessons and possibilities than you could hope to accomplish in one cycle or unit, which means the curriculum has room to be shifted depending on the particular strengths and needs of a class for which it is being used. Additionally, the narrative writing standards are not just in one grade and these skills come up again and again as students develop as writers. These lessons would take place within daily writing blocks, or “writer’s workshop” (Calkins, 1994; Graves 1995 in Cunningham & Allington, 2016), which is the term often used to describe the “process of children choosing their own topics and then writing, revising, editing and publishing” (Cunningham & Allington, 2016, p. 152). The main framework would entail a whole-class mini-lesson, time to write, and time to share. The purpose of the mini-lesson is to guide the writing process forward in a specific way and then give plenty of time for students to try on their own. The teacher will demonstrate the objective for the day with their own work, or use a student’s writing, in order to keep an emphasis on authenticity and modeling. By beginning the workshop time with a mini-lesson and teacher modeling, students hear a teacher “thinking aloud” to explain what is going on in their head and how they approach applying the strategy or skill of the lesson to their work. This is beneficial for students to get a clear demonstration of what is expected of them, not just

an explanation, in order to support them into a gradual release of responsibility model that many classrooms use (Cunningham & Allington, 2016, p. 104-105).

Within the writing time, the main portion of the class, teachers will conference with students to support and assess individual work, as well as get a sense for what mini-lessons the whole class needs (Cunningham & Allington, 2016; Davis & Hill, 2003). The focus in the lessons below is about writing workshop and not writing for content, which would be occurring in the classroom, but is not planned for in this unit. However, as the year continues, these writing processes come together, especially as students gain comfort with strategies learned in writing workshop. Throughout the year, students will have many opportunities to work on how they express themselves since one goal of the unit is craft, which Davis and Hill (2003) beautifully define:

Craft is how you say what you have to say. It is the writer's way of working with language in order to give each piece its own unique design. It plays on the literary sense, creating sensory images, stirring emotions, setting the mood, and supporting the voice of the piece. (p. 131)

Using personal narrative texts to study craft at the beginning of the year means that students will be studying an entire text. This means that the scope will be "wide and shallow" so they will learn a little bit about a lot of craft techniques. They will be reading as writers who have learned to identify and use various craft elements such as structure, leads, endings, character development, and conflict (Davis & Hill, 2003, p. 134).

Despite starting the year with a genre study, the overall emphasis is still on authenticity, modeling, and variety. These three elements will be present in groupings, in material, in authors, and in presentation. Emphasizing variety within a workshop

structure allows for a range of possibilities and hopefully increased engagement. Additionally, this unit creates opportunity for cross-curricular connections, and while time will not be spent discussing connections beyond the literature-writing one, it would be recommended to combine this work with art or drama. If a student or class is struck by the use of images in the personal narratives, perhaps art time could be used along with a mentor text as students continue to explore how words and images work together. If a class loves readers-theater or their comprehension is benefited by active retelling or if they think through the planning process best by acting out, then this opens up the possibilities with a drama class. While school schedules, state standards, and text frameworks set up the outline for this unit, the possibilities for adaptations are wide.

Making Sense of Standards

In our current education system, a conversation of Common Core Standards is unavoidable, even if in a private school setting. When I first began teaching, I did not know the difference between standards and testing, and based on conversations with non-educators, I think that can be a common confusion. The fear, worries, and real problems surrounding how testing affects children, teachers, schools, and families are real. However, for the purpose of planning, by only looking at the Common Core is to agree with Cunningham and Allington (2016) and the positive aspects like focusing on informational texts, higher-level and critical thinking, and communicating. Just as there were too many mini-lessons to possibly include in a single unit, there were too many standards. All standards are addressed throughout the year in various ways, and even if not addressed directly below or in the curriculum, the reading, writing, speaking, and

listening standards would be taking place within the classroom. For the personal narrative unit a few main anchor standards stood out (Common Core State Standards, 2010):

- Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text ELA.RL.3
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text ELA.RL.6
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take ELA.RL.9
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences ELA.W.3

The remaining reading standards, like “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (ELA.RL.1) would of course have a place in the classroom as comprehension and finding evidence would occur daily, but will be thought of as a “background standard” during this unit.

Once I had narrowed which standards to use as a foundation, I was still unsure what that meant for my lessons or how I was supposed to guide students to continually achieve the higher level of complexity awaiting them as they continue through the grade. The language of the standards from third to fifth grade are similar and do not help guide what differences a teacher should make depending on the age/grade. To help make sense of these standards I turned to *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). While the framework outlined here helped to direct what to look for in planning, teaching, and reflecting on lessons, I still found myself caught up in

some of the language between each grade. I compared the goals for thinking within, beyond, and about the text for interactive read-alouds and literature discussions and writing in grades three through five. The goals were overall very similar, despite a few wording adjustments. But a few shifts did appear. The thinking “within” goals for fourth graders built on the third-grade goals with the addition of focus more on vocabulary and setting than third graders and fifth graders were expected to work with more complex plots, use ideas from the text to “develop new ideas,” and hold mental summaries. In thinking “beyond the text” fourth graders are expected to ask questions, identify and discuss cultural perspectives in text different from own, and determine theme. However, in the third-grade goals it says to compare and contrast themes, which suggests determining theme is not a new to fourth grade skill. Fifth graders are then expected to think about symbolism, make more connections, determine mood, compare ideas with others in discussion, and compare themes of several stories. Many more thinking “about” the text goals are added between third and fourth grade. Fourth graders now should analyze an author’s choices in structure and craft and compare and contrast point of view, theme, structure. Fifth graders become more critical of word choice and craft, thinking about author’s purpose. Overall, as students get older they no longer just recognize and notice various elements but begin to analyze them.

Narrative writing, as explained in the *Continuum of Literacy*, is to have students “Writing about what they know. In doing so, they will learn to learn to observe their worlds closely” and learn to “write about small moments that capture strong feelings or significant experiences” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011, p. 106). It defines memoir as a brief, often intense memory of an event or person, and has an element of reflection or teaches

the reader a larger meaning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011, p. 106). Each year the definition of “memoir” expands, but I focused on the definition in fourth grade in my planning. In reviewing the goals for grades 3-5, I found that the writing goals proceeded and advanced in a more logical, clear way. Therefore, I think that these shifts are more accessible for teachers in planning lessons or creating a rubric on which to assess students at grade level. Overall, the goal is to have students view themselves as writers. Or, as put by Fountas and Pinnell (2011):

We want our students to make writing a part of their lives-to see themselves as writers who are constantly observing the world and gathering ideas and information for their writing. They need to become independent, self-motivated writers, consciously entering into their own learning and development and, in the process, expanding the ability to know themselves and their world. (p. 113)

To me, this overarching goal makes a clear argument as to why personal narrative should be a unit, if not one early on in the year to support development of all the skills listed above, as well as students’ attitudes about themselves as writers.

In reviewing the standards and goals in the literacy continuum, it was clear that they were developed with a progression in mind, and yet there are some components that cloud this. For example, reading literature standard 9 asks students in fourth grade to compare and contrast how different themes and topics are handled in different cultures. The fifth-grade standard is similar but without the emphasis on different cultures. I would think that the fourth-grade standard would be more difficult than the fifth-grade one, yet it comes first. And why did they take it out? Diversity is an important piece, and I am not sure why it disappears. For the purpose of this unit, I would try to keep in a variety of

authors because diversity of stories and storytellers matters, an idea further explored later. Additionally, the wording of the third-grade standard 9 asks students to compare the same author, which makes it a good time to engage students in an author study, a possibility of this unit.

Currently, I do not teach literature and my last experience teaching, writing, and using mentor texts in literature was to fourth graders, so this is where my mind went in envisioning this classroom. However, after a year in a special education setting, I feel strongly about leaving the possibilities open. Thus, the standard progression is a guide for creating expectations and pushing students as appropriate to their developmental level. Even in a small classroom, some of my students may need more scaffolding in comprehension, others in decoding, and some in demands of the writing process, so their developmental levels are going to be a range depending on the activity. To support their literacy skills, strategies, and practices, I believe teachers should take a more holistic approach when looking at a continuum of standards to identify what their students need and how they can get there. Cunningham and Allington (2016) summarized it well:

Effective writing programs will look very different grade by grade and will have expectations for children at each grade that are appropriate to their development as writers. The best writing instruction teaches students how to plan, compose, revise, and edit their own pieces of writing, all within the context of inquiry, self-assessment, and self-regulation fostered by interaction with teachers and peers. (p. 176)

If even the people who write standards and continuum are not that clear on a progression, then I think it is up to the teacher, grade team, department to create their own scope and sequence based on what is out there to best fit their classrooms and teaching.

Why Personal Narrative

There were three main factors in my decision to focus on personal narrative for this first unit: developmental appropriateness, community building, and sharing multiple stories.

Developmental appropriateness. ELA Writing standard 3 exists in kindergarten and asks that students, “Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.” Grades 1 and 2 is stated similarly except the expectation is that the student is writing. But it is in grade three, that this standard gets substandards, meaning it begins to take a larger place in late elementary curricula. Davis and Hill (2003) reflect that what they most often saw kids writing about was their memories, observations of things around them, descriptions of people and places important in their lives, and opinions, wonderings, wishes, family stories, hobbies, other passions. Based on this, they reflected:

Children write best about the things that are important to them. It is writing that comes from what they know and what they have experienced. We encourage students to be in touch with what’s going on in the world, by paying attention to the meaningful, everyday things that may otherwise go unnoticed and unrecorded.

(p. 7)

Their observations are not surprising and are supported by typical patterns in development. According to Wood (2007), some developmental growth patterns show that many nine-year-olds “love descriptive language” and “word play” and ten-year-olds “listen well,” “read voraciously,” and are “expressive and talkative, like to explain things.” Wood’s (2007) summaries of developmental stages and what Davis and Hill (2003) saw in the classroom suggests teaching to these interests and strengths. These overlaps support the idea that a personal narrative unit is a natural fit for elementary classrooms where they can work on creating readers, writers, and observers of the world around them. By encouraging the interests of students and asking the students to read and write about what they know, the possibility for sharing within reading and writing begins within the first literacy unit.

Community building. Community building is important all year, but especially crucial at the beginning of the year. As Larivee (2000) explained, community building means creating an open and ongoing dialogue and getting to know your students and taking an interest in their story. I cannot think of a better way to do this than to build an entire unit around sharing stories and making voices heard. By following Larivee’s model, community building is enmeshed in the content and structure of the classroom and is not just something that exists within the first two weeks of school. It allows the teacher to hear and respond to stories. While the classrooms I have taught in largely reflect the neighborhood (East Harlem or Upper West Side) and not the diversity that could be found in a New York City school, ensuring students voice and their stories are heard is a priority and an advantage.

More than a single story. Maybe it was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s famous TED talk, our current political climate, or the repetition of it from Bank Street classes found in poignant stories like Robert Lake’s “An Indian Father’s Plea” (Lake, 1990), but in planning this unit I wanted to avoid the “single story.” Adichie said, “The consequence of the single story is that it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult and it emphasizes that we are different rather than how we are similar” (2009). It will be the teachers job to acknowledge to yourself, and to your students, that the texts used show a range, but still are only *some* stories and that students’ voices will help to bring in more. When teachers and students understand their responsibility to share and listen, they become part of the larger, global community.

Finding Mentor Texts

My goal was to find mentor texts that would support my key principles: developmentally appropriate reading and writing skills, community building, and a range of stories. Instead of doing an author study, I wanted to offer students multiple writers to give a variety of styles, perspectives, histories, and craft. A mentor text should have topics and stories that students can relate to as this will “spark ideas for their own writing” and the “underlying issue” that students “uncover” can inspire writing in “relation to their own lives.” Mentor texts that not only have powerful stories but are well written then provide opportunities to teach the qualities of good writing in the genre (Davis & Hill, 2003, p. 10). The list that follows is based on these recommendations, but it is an ever-growing list as more texts are published. I also found that as I planned the

unit, depending on the length of text, time for reading, and class needs, there is a lot of potential for flexibility with the books and how you want to use them.

Picture Books	
<p><i>The Relatives Came</i> by Cynthia Rylant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sequence of events - Importance of family - They/we/us (no I) 	<p><i>When I was Young in the Mountains</i> by Cynthia Rylant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repetition of “When I was young in the mountains” - Special place and traditions
<p><i>Thank you, Mr. Falker</i> by Patricia Polacco</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of family, role models - Persistence - Moment that shows change 	<p><i>My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother</i> by Patricia Polacco</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annoying yet lovable siblings - Unexpected moment/moment that shows change
<p><i>Bigmama’s</i> by Donald Crews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of family - Sequence of events 	<p><i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special places and traditions - Using story connect to history
<p><i>This is the Rope</i> by Jacqueline Woodson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repetition of “This is the rope” - Using story to connect to history 	<p><i>Show Way</i> by Jacqueline Woodson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repetition of - Using story to connect to history
Chapter Books	
<p><i>My Life in Dog Years</i> by Gary Paulsen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each chapter a different dog/story - Topics: hunting, farms, family, sled, bullies, adventure 	<p><i>Knucklehead</i> by Jon Scieszka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short 2-5 pg. chapters - Partly chronological, memorable moments - Becoming a writer/getting ideas - Includes pictures, drawings
<p><i>26 Fairmount Avenue</i> by Tomie dePaola</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sequential, built around big moments - Small drawings related to events in 	<p><i>Knots in my Yo-Yo String</i> by Jerry Spinelli</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starts with a map, first page at 16 years, then goes back to being young and moves forward (mostly)

<p>chapter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topics: family, school, storms <p>Short, and possibility for others in series</p>	<p>chronologically, back to dog at the end</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - p. 76 list of “16 things I wished I could do” - Topics: family, friends, small town, sports, school - Becoming a writer
<p><i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> by Jacqueline Woodson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Written in verse - Repetition in titles - Topics: family, growing up, race, identify 	<p><i>I am Malala</i> by Malala Yousafzai</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starts with prologue (day of shooting) but then chapters go mostly chronologically - Topics: family, friendship, education, Taliban, activism
<p>Additional Narrative/Personal Narrative Texts</p> <p>Picture Books</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A Chair for My Mother</i> by Vera B. Williams - <i>Owl Moon</i> by Jane Yolen - <i>Shortcut</i> by Donald Crews - <i>Fireflies</i> by Julie Brinckloe - <i>Roller Coaster</i> by Marla Frazee - <i>Stella Tells her Story</i> by Janiel Wagstaff - <i>The Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de la Peña - <i>Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street</i> by Roni Schotter - <i>Junkyard Wonders</i> by Patricia Polacco <p>Short Stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “My Grandmother’s Hair” by Cynthia Rylant - “Driving at night” by Ralph Fletcher <p>Chapter Books</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Through My Eyes</i> by Ruby Bridges - <i>Boy</i> by Roald Dahl - <i>Flying Lessons & other stories</i> Edited by Ellen Oh* - <i>Tasting the Sky</i> by Ibtisam Barakat* - <i>House on Mango Street</i> by Sandra Cisneros* - <i>A Long Walk to Water</i> by Linda Sue Park* - <i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind</i> by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer* <p>* Better for older students or very strong, mature readers</p>	

Curriculum

Weekly Overviews

Week 1. In the first week, the focus is immersion into the genre of personal narrative and comprehension of texts that will later serve as mentor texts for writing lessons. The teacher will begin to fill the classroom with personal narrative books to be read together and independently. Immersion into the genre is important because it allows students to explore and become familiar with the qualities of narrative writing (Davis & Hill, 2003). As the class explores various personal narrative picture books, daily lessons center on comprehension of each story while making observations on how the story is told. This supports an initial emphasis on ELA reading literature standard 3, “analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text,” and standard 6, “assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text” (Common Core State Standards, 2010). As students explore the genre of personal narrative, the mentor texts will allow for conversations and connections during literature that support their journey as writers of their own narratives. It will be important that plenty of sharing time is allocated so that students can learn from others and expand ideas about topics and craft of personal narratives (Davis & Hill, 2003, p. 69). Knowing that some students are better verbal storytellers than in writing, it might be beneficial to keep track of connections that students make during literature. This way teachers can remind students of their ideas if they “feel stuck” later on during writing. As writers, students will begin to develop their notebook with an emphasis on creating an “expert list” or a list of things they can write about. As the week comes to an end, students will practice expanding an idea on the list into an entry in their notebooks.

Week 2. After the immersion atmosphere has been established, the focus of week two is to move students beyond comprehension and begin inquiry into the craft and theme of personal narratives. This begins students' work towards ELA reading literature standard 9, "analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take" (Common Core State Standards, 2010). In order for students to compare and contrast authors' approaches to similar themes and topics, students will need specific mini-lessons on identifying theme. Depending on the needs and readiness of the class, small, guided, literature groups could begin this week as well. However, for the purpose of planning this unit, small groups will be discussed in week three. As writers, this week students will continue freewriting and expanding ideas into entries, as well as using their growing understanding of the genre as readers to support their writing. They will try to emulate the mentor texts by adding in dialogue and focusing on developing a theme.

Week 3. While whole class conversations around the elements of personal narratives will continue, week three shifts into small groups. These groups will be a mix of literature circles and guided reading groups. They will be teacher monitored, at times teacher-led, but continue to be driven by student inquiry and analysis. Each day is given an overall mini-lesson/focus to guide the whole class, but it will be explored within the text of the group. These ideas can also be explored within short picture books, or longer chapter books. If using picture books, the series of lessons in weeks 3 and 4 will be condensed and repeated by using the "Craft Study" sheets. If using chapter books, the following weekly outlines can be used. As students move deeper into their understanding

of the genre, daily writing lessons reflect an understanding of the techniques of personal narrative writing.

Week 4. As students and teacher settle into the unit and structure of literature and writing blocks, this week allows for a deeper dive into the structure of the texts they are reading and the stories they are writing. Writing and literature lessons continue to mirror each other as students expand their study and understanding of craft techniques.

Week 5. The fifth week pushes students into the revision phase. At this point, students have read and explored multiple personal narrative texts. If groups are reading a single, long text, then the teacher has made time for sharing findings and keeping track of examples of craft and structure on a whole class chart. Writing lessons and conferences now focus on taking drafts of stories and identifying strategies to apply.

Week 6. By this week, literature circles will have finished their texts and teachers may want to wrap up their reading in various ways. Depending on school or teacher preferences and classroom needs, summative assessments could take form as a test, paper, presentation, or other project. While the unit comes to a close, students will focus on editing and polishing their written work. ELA writing standard states that students can “write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences” (Common Core State Standards, 2010). To ensure their work includes “effective” technique, teachers and students can create a checklist based on the craft elements they have identified and studied throughout the unit. This could become a rubric for assessing student work as well. Finally, make time for sharing and celebrating students work. This

can continue into the year by finding a place in the classroom to keep published student work.

Weekly Lesson Plans

Week: 1		
Goal: Immersion into personal narrative genre and developing community of storytellers		
Essential Questions: What is a personal narrative? What can we learn from other people's stories?		
Teaching points:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal narrative is a story from the writer's life (like memoir) - Personal narratives have many characteristics of fiction (e.g. setting, tension/problem/conflict, character(s) development, dialogue, problem resolution) - Who tells the story and how (point of view vs. perspective, structure) - We can learn from reading and listening to other people's stories and a good story is one we can connect to 		
	Reading	Writing
Day 1	<p>Focus: Defining personal narrative (first person); exploring character motivation/development</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i>, Anchor Chart</p>	<p>Focus: Intro to the Writer's Notebook and start "Expert Inventory"/ "Things I can write about" list</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks</p>
Day 2	<p>Focus: Defining personal narrative (dialogue); exploring character feelings and relationships</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>A Different Pond</i>, Anchor Chart</p>	<p>Focus: Adding to the list (people, places, things) and brainstorm</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks</p>
Day 3	<p>Focus: Defining personal narrative (personal history); exploring character feelings</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>This is the Rope</i>, Anchor Chart</p>	<p>Focus: Adding to the list (objects, places), how to go from a brainstorm to a notebook entry</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks</p>

Day 4	<p>Focus: Defining personal narrative (significant moment); exploring character relationships</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother</i> by Patricia Polacco</p>	<p>Focus: Adding to the list (moments of change), practice brainstorm → entry</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks</p>
Day 5	<p>Focus: Defining personal narrative (story people can connect with); exploring character relationships</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>The Relatives Came</i> by Cynthia Rylant</p>	<p>Focus: Adding to the list moments in your life like one of the mentor texts read this week (e.g. visiting relatives), practice brainstorm → entry</p> <p>Text/Materials: Books from the week, notebooks</p>

Week: 2		
Goal: Immersion, inquiry, and analysis		
Essential Questions: What can we learn from other people's stories? How do people tell their stories? How can reading other people's stories help us become better writers?		
Teaching points:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pictures and images support storytelling - The technique and use of dialogue in narrative writing - General sequence of stories (beginning, middle, end), but the timeline of stories can be from one day to many years - A theme is the big idea or message in a story and readers can find evidence to explain why that is the theme 		
	Reading	Writing
Day 1	<p>Focus: Pictures help tell a story (just use pictures to tell story; read a story with no pictures and students illustrate in groups)</p> <p>Text/Materials: Books from week 1</p>	<p>Focus: Using pictures to inspire stories (What moment did it capture? Story behind the photo?)</p> <p>Text/Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Knucklehead</i> chapters 14, 18 or 19 - Personal photographs

Day 2	<p>Focus: What dialogue adds to a story; reader's theater</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother</i>, an imagined draft of the story without dialogue</p>	<p>Focus: Adding dialogue to a notebook entry</p> <p>Text/Materials: Dialogue cards, notebooks, student generated list of tag words</p>
Day 3	<p>Focus: Finding the big idea/theme (believing in yourself, perseverance)</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>Thank You Mr. Falker</i>, sticky notes</p>	<p>Focus: Diary vs. notebook/Identifying the heart (theme) of an entry</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks, highlighters</p>
Day 4	<p>Focus: Finding the big idea/theme (Importance of Family/Friends)</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>Show Way</i>, sticky notes</p>	<p>Focus: Expanding entries with details or moments that show the theme</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks</p>
Day 5	<p>Focus: Comparing and contrasting similar themes (family)</p> <p>Text/Materials: <i>Bigmama's</i>, <i>The Relatives Came</i>, Venn Diagram</p>	<p>Focus: Picking a theme and brainstorming moments from your life that demonstrate it; expanding moments into entry</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks, expert list</p>

Week: 3		
Goal: Inquiry and analysis		
Essential Questions: What can we learn from other people's stories? How do people tell their stories? How can reading other people's stories help us become better writers?		
Teaching Points:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different authors and even books by the same author handle the same topic in various ways - Identifying and discussing the setting, the problem, the events of the story, and the problem resolution - The purpose of conflict/challenging moments and their resolution is often to show a theme of the story - Describing and inferring characters' feelings and motivations from description, what they do or say, and what others think about them 		
	Reading	Writing
Day 1	Focus: Where and when is the story taking place? How do you know? Text/Materials: Guided reading text, sticky notes	Focus: Creating and describing a setting Text/Materials: Notebooks, anchor chart
Day 2	Focus: Who is telling the story? What do we know so far about the narrator? Text/Materials: Guided reading text	Focus: Planning story and freewriting Text/Materials: Notebooks, character charts
Day 3	Focus: Exploring character actions and relationships Text/Materials: Guided reading text	Focus: Planning and expanding characters (traits, motivations) Text/Materials: Notebooks
Day 4	Focus: How does the character handle challenges? How does a character's actions contribute to events of the story? Text/Materials: Guided reading text	Focus: Adding in a challenging moment, writing about thoughts, feelings, actions Text/Materials: Notebooks
Day 5	Focus: Comparing characters Text/Materials: Guided reading text, Venn diagram	Focus: Creating a character as contrast to narrator Text/Materials: Notebooks

Week: 4		
Goal: Analysis and Drafting		
Essential Questions: What can we learn from other people’s stories? How do people tell their stories? How can reading other people’s stories help us become better writers? How do writers improve their work?		
Teaching Points:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different authors and even books by the same author handle the same topic in various ways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is true for theme as well (potential to again compare/contrast theme depending on group/class) - Noticing and understanding the overall text structure - Analyzing how structure contributes to the meaning and effectiveness of the story 		
	Reading	Writing
Day 1	<p>Focus: How can you tell it is personal narrative? What is the overall structure of the story?</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text</p>	<p>Focus: Mapping the structure of your story</p> <p>Text/Materials: Various outlines/templates, notebooks</p>
Day 2	<p>Focus: How did the story begin? What was the lead?</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text, Anchor chart</p>	<p>Focus: Different ways to start a personal narrative to help pull the reader into the story</p> <p>Text/Materials: Anchor chart, Notebooks→ testing out different leads</p>
Day 3	<p>Focus: How did the story show the tension?</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text</p>	<p>Focus: Building conflict in your story (thoughts, feelings, actions)</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading texts, story map</p>
Day 4	<p>Focus: How did the story show the main conflict?</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text</p>	<p>Focus: Slowing down and stretching out a moment (strong verbs)</p> <p>Text/Materials: “Foul Shot” by Edwin A. Hoey</p>

Day 5	<p>Focus: How did the story end?</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text</p>	<p>Focus: Creating a sense of closure in stories</p> <p>Text/Materials: Anchor chart, Notebooks→ deciding on and crafting an ending</p>
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Week: 5		
Goal: Analysis, drafting, and revising		
Essential Questions: How can reading other people's stories help us become better writers? How do writers edit and revise their work?		
Teaching Points:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using our understanding of the craft of mentor texts to help improve our own work - Editing and revising are different, but both important 		
	Reading	Writing
Day 1	<p>Focus: Identifying favorite descriptions</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text, favorite description handout</p>	<p>Focus: Adding and expanding descriptions using 5 senses</p> <p>Text/Materials: Chart/word list for 5 senses, notebooks</p>
Day 2	<p>Focus: How dialogue is used in the story (extension: internal or external)</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text, sticky notes</p>	<p>Focus: Creating effective, engaging, authentic dialogue (strong tag words, order)</p> <p>Text/Materials: Mentor texts, notebooks</p>
Day 3	<p>Focus: How does the author transition between pages? Chapters? Stories?</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text</p>	<p>Focus: How to use transition words and phrases</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks, drafts</p>
Day 4	<p>Focus: Identifying the theme of guided reading text</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text, sticky notes</p>	<p>Focus: Identifying theme of your story; identify theme of a peer's story</p> <p>Text/Materials: Notebooks, drafts</p>

Day 5	<p>Focus: Identifying favorite moments and exploring the writer’s craft/why it is a favorite</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text, favorite moment handout</p>	<p>Focus: Finding parts to revise, using mentor texts as inspiration, crafting a title</p> <p>Text/Materials: Mentor texts, craft study sheets/chart, drafts</p>
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Week: 6		
Goal: Revising and publishing		
Essential Questions: How can reading other people’s stories help us become better writers? How do writers edit and revise their work?		
Teaching Points:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Editing and revising are different, but both important - Comparing and contrasting craft and stories of unit’s texts 		
	Reading	Writing
Day 1	<p>Focus: Spicy and juicy words</p> <p>Text/Materials: Guided reading text, dictionary, vocabulary bookmarks</p>	<p>Focus: Retiring overused/boring words</p> <p>Text/Materials: Highlighters, thesaurus, drafts</p>
Day 2	<p>End of Book Formal Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Test - Project - Paper - Presentation 	<p>Focus: Peer editing</p> <p>Text/Materials: Peer editing checklist, drafts</p>
Day 3		<p>Focus: Adding transitions; Eliminating unnecessary words, phrases, sentences</p> <p>Text/Materials: Drafts</p>
Day 4		<p>Focus: Final edits for spelling, punctuation, capitalization</p> <p>Text/Materials: Final drafts</p>
Day 5	Publishing Party/Celebration	

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction of unit's structure, mini-lessons during writing should be focused on how to best support the whole class, not a few students. Therefore, the order of lessons, and even the focus of the mini-lessons themselves, is only a possible outline and should be altered depending on the strengths and needs of the classroom. As a teacher who is not currently teaching literature nor in this age group, I planned the unit for "unknown" students, based on developmental patterns and expectations. When I first began planning I thought about creating three separate curricula: one for third grade, one for fourth grade, and one for fifth grade. However, having worked in two different settings, one general education in East Harlem, and now special education on the Upper West Side, I decide to create one curriculum, but with the possibilities to include a range of texts and a variety of options to differentiate the curriculum. For example, the lessons could be slowed down and spread out over days instead of working with a new topic each day. Or, lessons like crafting a title could be added in; this might be especially important if the mentor texts guide students in that direction. There is also the possibility for cross-curricular connections between art and drama. Maybe students were inspired by the images in a text and want to create and add in their own. Or perhaps students' comprehension, understanding of structure, or inspiration happens best when they do reader's theater, so it makes sense to link with drama. The options for finding quality mentor texts, though some of them are not personal narratives, means teachers and classes have many possibilities for inspiration and teachable moments. Regardless of the exact order of the mini-lessons or the mentor texts used, the significant goals stay the same: students will think about why people share personal stories, how are they told,

what can we learn from them, and how reading someone else's story can help you write your own. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie said, "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity" (2009). So, it matters less about the specific writing mini-lesson on revising on day 21, than it does about opening students up to the importance of storytelling, sharing, and listening. I believe that students understand the power of their voices and although they cannot yet vote or run for office, they can share their stories with those who can. While they might not phrase it like Adichie, the students I have met have shown me how important it is for me to hear, understand, and empower them. They want to have their voices heard. They deserve to have their voices heard. What is a better way to do this than through teaching and guiding them to share their own stories and listen to the stories of others?

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