

Exploring Uniqueness in a World That's All the Same

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Introduction

“What’s your story?” This is the first journal prompt I pose to my seniors at the beginning of the school year. To help them understand what I mean, I clarify by saying “What are you about?” “What gets you out of bed in the morning?” “What stirs your soul”?

They often look confused, and as they write, I wonder how many of them have asked themselves these questions. How many of them, I think to myself, have actually taken the time to consider what defines their existence, what motivates their choices, what directs their dreams and desires. And judging by their typical responses, the answer is---not many.

And yet this is such an important consideration for these students, just a few months from graduating and so eager to take more ownership over the direction of their stories. I’m essentially asking them, “Who are you?” Helping students explore that most important of questions is the focus of this unit. Allowing them to reflect on their identities and their worldviews while they tell their stories----and helping them see how their lives are unique and yet share similarities to all people----is a primary purpose of this endeavor.

And story is an apt genre to help them ponder these questions. The very word *story* is loaded with meaning. Offering a definition might seem easy enough: a tale that follows some characters along some plotline in some place and (usually) has a beginning middle and end. But its connotation is what makes it so powerful, what makes it speak to our souls. *Story* creates a sense of nostalgia, evoking a simplicity and wonder and passion that take us to our earliest memories and, in some ways, to ones we’ve never had. It connects us with others, not only as readers of specific titles but as characters in a universal drama that spans millennia.

My hope is that students will come to understand their stories this way, as both theirs and everyone else’s. Yes, I want students to celebrate their unique life experiences and develop their personal voice and style. But beyond this, I want them to see their stories as connected to a larger one. Though the piece they will create for this unit is technically about them, I want them to understand that it is not exclusively their story. And this is true in many regards. First, I want them to see how they are products of the people and places around them. More than this, I want them to realize that their individual stories are not entirely distinct. That they connect with a broader human story. That, as

Solomon declares, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”

This realization could discourage some students but, framed correctly, it could also inspire and humble them. To feel like a member of a larger family, one that spans time and place, induces awe. It evokes a sense of connectedness that stirs the soul and sparks amazement.

It also offers a perspective that challenges our importance in a way that I think is entirely healthy, especially for teenagers, most of whom have been raised on a brand of American individualism that exacerbates their innate self-centeredness.

Rationale

The first unit of my course involves writing an autobiographical narrative. It asks students to tell of an experience (or series of experiences) that helped shape or expose/reinforce their worldview. The specific focus is prescribed by the college with which we work, but the assignment has strong ties to the college essay requirement that all English 12 students complete.

My prior experience with teaching this unit revealed that students struggle to articulate their own stories. Students appreciate the opportunity to write about themselves but often struggle to move beyond standard moments or cliché language. For a variety of reasons, they often have not had to spend much time thinking about their worldview in general, much less how it has developed or how it impacts their day-to-day thought processes.

This is not to say that the students do not discuss important topics. On the contrary, they talk about family, or friends, or wanting to go to college. They discuss virtues like being kind or working hard. And they frequently offer ideas about helping others and serving the community.

The issue is not with the subject matter. No, the very fact that most of them discuss similar values reinforces a key premise of this unit: that we live in a world that is “all the same.” The concern I have with their responses is with the surface level explanations they offer.

Consider a sampling from this year’s responses to the journal prompt discussed in the Introduction (exactly as students submitted them):

I love animals, going to the beach, and eating good food. However, I would say the driving force behind who I am and what gets me out of bed in the morning is my

family. My family is very important to me, and without them I wouldn't be who I am today.

What defines me is sarcasm itself. I am a very sarcastic person and enjoy doing so. I guess you can say it's my sense of humor. However I can be generous and will go out of my way to help someone if I'm not miserable that day for whatever reason.

What gets me out of bed in the morning is wanting to better myself and become a better individual. I like seeing my friends and hanging out. I also like music. I try to put a lot of myself in my work and a lot of music defines me. I think right now in high school is a point that defines me. I enjoy the freedom and figuring out what I'm gonna do for the rest of my life. I've enjoyed the memories I have and the teachers I have met.

I'm all about my social life, I love waking up thinking that I have the whole day ahead of me with a whole lot to partake in. over the summer I have a similar routine. I either wake up and go to work or to wake up and stroll to the beach. i like to work because I like to make people's day. I get to interact with strangers to brighten up their mood. on the other hand i dread going to work because I miss out on the beach.

I appreciate the honesty revealed in these responses, and I do not mean to suggest that high school seniors should not be interested in their social lives or spending time at the beach. But that their descriptions would be so vague and general to a question that asks them to *examine their souls* makes me realize the importance of this unit. That a high school senior would credit his/her family with contributing to his identity is encouraging, but that s/he would simply offer the trite idea that he “wouldn't be who [he is] today without them” shows definite room for growth. The most pressing question I have in response to this student and his classmates is, “Yes, exactly. But who are you?” Considering an answer to this question, and being able to articulate the response in a thoughtfully crafted manner are the primary goals of this unit.

Background

This unit is designed for seniors enrolled in a Dual Enrollment course, which allows them to earn high school credit for English 12 and up to six college credits in introductory English. Unlike most other courses at Appoquinimink High School, Dual Enrollment English has a prerequisite: Students must earn at least a 480 on the Reading section of the SAT, or receive an equivalent score on the college's Accuplacer exam. Most of the students come from our Honors/AP track and have the desire to attend a four-year college or university. Of the 35 students enrolled in the course's inaugural year (2015-16), each received acceptance into at least one of his/her desired schools.

Objectives

Using others' stories to help students unpack their own experiences will, I hope, serve three important purposes: It will provide students with strong models of craft. It will help them consider the importance of choosing specific, purposefully selected details and language. And it will help them connect with other authors (a term I plan to use to describe the students as well) as they develop empathy and understanding. For specific information regarding how the objectives of this unit connect with the District and Common Core Standards, see Appendix A.

Concepts

The Power and Purpose of Story

A Native American proverb pays homage to the power of story: "Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me a truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever."¹

In discussing the power of story to unite us, Satell says, "A compelling story can evolve into a narrative that inspires a shared sense of mission. That, in turn can lead to a long and great legacy. That's the power of story. A story is an event. Yet as part of a larger narrative, it provides the core of a mission."²

Consider how stories have influenced our childhoods and how being told similar tales have shaped us in similar ways. How Aesop has taught us right from wrong. How the Grimm Brothers have taught us to wonder and to fear. How Dr. Seuss has taught us to play and create. These are but a few of our shared authors. They belong to generations, and they tell of the power of story. A recent neuroscience study conducted at Princeton revealed that telling a story can create empathy in the listener and also causes synchronization in the brains of the storyteller and receiver: "When you listen to stories and understand them, you experience the exact same brain pattern as the person telling the story."³ Certainly, if stories have the ability to connect our minds and influence our actions, it is reasonable to believe that they stir us in our deepest core, all the way to our souls.

It is this power of story to both shape and reflect our lives that students will explore in this unit.

The Characteristics of Story

As they read and then create stories, students will focus on specific criteria and elements. The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing argues that "a story depicts events that are

connected casually or thematically to create a sense of tension that is resolved through action, insight, or understanding.”⁴ This definition helps students unpack several of the elements of story, including plot, conflict, and theme, but fails to mention character or setting.

To develop this definition, we review the methods of characterization and discuss how place functions to provide context and how, in many ways, it serves as the canvas onto which the rest of the story is painted.

Making these components explicit is necessary, as students find it difficult to write a story, rather than a traditional essay. When they struggle here, their issues often involve simply focusing on “the what” (a list of events) and maybe including names of characters. Very often, however, they do not weave the events together or develop their characters in a way that creates interest or communicates theme. In addition, they find it difficult to “show rather than tell.” By this, I mean that students tell about a character or an event or a setting but do not bring it to life with their description or overall detail.

Writer’s Craft

So much of the writing instruction students receive in high school focuses on closed form prose that when given the opportunity to write in open form, they are left confused. How does one write an introduction to a story? Or frame a piece without a thesis? Or create cohesiveness without formal transitions, like “in addition” and “for example”? These questions perplex students and, in the absence of narrative models and explicit writing instruction, decrease the likelihood that their writing pieces will meet standards of the assignment, or perhaps more importantly, allow students to discover their voices, explore their identities, and view their stories as simultaneously unique and shared.

Our discussion of craft will focus on incorporating dialogue, showing versus telling, varying sentence length and structure and utilizing figurative language—particularly metaphor. This focus on this trope is important for a variety of reasons. Namely, students continually express that they find metaphors difficult to understand as they read and, by extension, struggle to create these types of comparisons and ideas in their writing. Beyond aiding their reading comprehension, I also think metaphor could help students hone in on the message they are trying to convey about themselves.

In talking with another DTI fellow, I was helped in thinking about how to frame this idea with students. She encouraged me to let students write their first draft and then, in an attempt to assist them in focusing on their key point, ask them to create a metaphor to communicate the theme of their story. In addition to helping students dig past the surface, my hope is that this activity also allows them to think about audience—in two distinct ways. Yes, I want them to clarify their points so their audience can understand,

but I also want them to see the very notion of figurative language as reinforcing the connection that people share. Metaphor exists, in many ways, at a symbolic level and only works if the audience is familiar with the object of comparison; to anchor their story in a metaphor, or at least refine it by creating one, will cause students to consider others' perspectives, to reflect on what is familiar and shared and common to many----thus reinforcing the message about story's universality.

One additional focus regarding craft will be helping students understand the power of strong verbs and aiding them in using language that captures their true voices, rather than what often is an overly academic and thesaurus dependent diction.

The Writing Process

Students often resist the early stages of the writing process. They spend little time exploring questions, brainstorming ideas, or outlining their thoughts. The truth of this is often revealed in writing that struggles to arrive at its main point until page 2 or 3, if ever. Or that is replete with unsupported ideas arranged in a haphazard manner, even if they are somehow forced into paragraphs.

With regards to this unit, the danger of skipping these early steps is the increased risk of generating cliché ideas that fail to reveal the student's heart, not only resulting in a lackluster paper but also preventing the chance for the student to identify with others, to discover his place and see how it compares/contrasts with those around him.

Students will engage in the prewriting stage as they seek to determine not only which story they want to tell but as they explore their worldview and the central components of their identities. They will write several drafts and receive feedback from their peers and from me, being asked to revise and/or edit after each feedback session. The current plan for publication is to simply submit the paper via our learning management system, but students may desire to go beyond this and share their work with a wider audience.

Models

Throughout the unit, we will focus on several model texts, which are sometimes called mentor texts. This research-based practice was cited by the Alliance for Excellent Education as one of eleven essential strategies for improving writing instruction, having been found in six separate studies to yield a positive effect on student writing.⁵

There are several goals for using models in this unit. Primarily, I want students to analyze professional examples of excellent craft and content and then lead students through emulating a variety of aspects of these works. Additionally, each of these model

texts has been selected due to its thematic similarities to what the students will be writing: coming of age, finding one's voice, examining identity, etc.

Beyond helping them understand what I want them to produce in terms of precision, specificity, and overall narrative quality, I also want to use these texts to help students see themselves in someone else's story. I am encouraged in this approach by Ruth Culham who says that, "It seems logical...to turn to texts to understand writing more deeply rather than relying on worksheets to figure out how writing works." She adds that teachers should "throw out the formulas and replace them with thinking activities that allow students to develop bigger understandings of how good writing works."⁶ I agree, and I think spending time in our unit to study model texts helps achieve these goals.

Materials

The unit will involve a combination of readings, videos, and small writing pieces. These resources will aim to provide students an overview of narrative, analyze several models, and consider authors' perspectives on the purposes and methods of storytelling.

The culminating project will be a 2-3 page autobiographical narrative, which students will publish. In addition to creating a brief presentation to share with their classmates, they will also upload their work to writeabout.com (or similar sites) and display hard copies of their narratives in the classroom (Consideration will be made to sensitivity of information).

Model Texts

Fish Cheeks, Amy Tan

Recounting a Christmas Eve Dinner when she was 14, Tan explores the ideas of cultural differences, self-acceptance, family, and coming of age. Tan's parents have invited the minister's family--including their son on whom Amy has a crush---to enjoy a traditional Chinese meal. Her parents' behavior embarrasses Amy and leaves the guests feeling less than comfortable. At the end of the evening, Amy realizes that her mother's main purpose in planning the event was to allow Amy to come to terms with her internal struggle, namely her confusion regarding her cultural background. The scene concludes this way:

"After everyone had gone, my mother said to me. "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame."⁷

As the shortest text in the unit, this piece serves as a great starting point to introduce the ideas of close reading and to help students gain confidence with analysis. Beyond these practicalities, the text fits the unit for the thematic ideas already mentioned.

Stylistically, it serves as an excellent example of strong diction, particularly in the choice of verbs and understatement:

“Dinner threw me deeper into despair...My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert grimaced. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. Amy, your favorite,” he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear.””

Here, Tan’s ability to capture the characters’ conflict and to contrast cultural norms in such a concise manner provides students with a strong model of the power of carefully chosen words. Additionally, it serves as a helpful example of how to weave the major conflict into the narrative in a way that is cohesive and purposeful.

Learning to Read and Write, Frederick Douglass

This excerpt from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, focuses on two key conflicts: Douglass’ quest to become literate and slavery’s ability to corrupt the human heart and mind. It fits this unit in many aspects. Thematically, it works as a coming of age story, as it recounts the development of Douglass’ self-advocacy and his pursuit of knowledge and truth, which become defining principles of his life. In discussing this latter idea, he states, “The moral which I gained from the dialogue [in the book he was reading] was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder.”⁸ Here, Douglass ties his specific experiences into the development of his moral identity, which is exactly what my students are asked to do in their narratives.

Stylistically, the excerpt features varied syntax and elevated, but not overdone, diction. His prose is precise yet descriptive, as seen here: Nothing seemed to make [my mistress] more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

In addition to his purposeful word choice, the strength of the characterization, as well as the tight focus on his overall theme regarding the relationship between slavery and education also serve to make this an effective model for students.

Champion of the World, Maya Angelou

This excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* tells of Joe Louis’ victory over Primo Carnera, which Angelou uses as a metaphor for victory for all African Americans. Seen through her seven year old eyes, Angelou recounts the match, as she and the local

townspeople who had “wedge[d] themselves”⁹ into her uncle’s store sit transfixed by the broadcaster’s every word. This highly engaging and poignantly crafted text aligns with the unit’s goals in several ways. By focusing on the role of an individual as part of something larger than himself, in this case the role of Joe Louis as an ambassador of his entire race, the passage is intended to help students understand how their voice contributes to a more universal story. Stylistically, the excerpt works beautifully in its incorporation of dialogue and dialect; its precise, revelatory words, and its subtlety in communicating theme. Consider this excerpt from the end of the story:

Then the voice, husky and familiar, came to wash over us—“The winnah, and still heavyweight champeen of the world . . . Joe Louis.” Champion of the world. A Black boy. Some Black mother’s son. He was the strongest man in the world. People drank Coca-Colas like ambrosia and ate candy bars like Christmas... Those who lived too far had made arrangements to stay in town. It wouldn’t be fit for a Black man and his family to be caught on a lonely country road on a night when Joe Louis had proved that we were the strongest people in the world.

Exploring the Role of Story

This component will be woven throughout the entire unit and will be primarily comprised of shorter texts (both articles and videos) to help students engage with a multitude of ideas from a variety of sources. (See Appendix C for additional texts I plan to use, in addition to those listed in the Lessons section). When possible, the materials used here will involve student choice, collaboration, and presentation. For instance, students will be given a list of possible magazine articles to read and will be asked to choose one; groups will be formed based on students’ choices. (An alternative here it to assign groups and give students a choice of a few texts within their group). Students will be asked to collaborate to create and then deliver a poster presentation about their article, which will allow the entire class to interact with the ideas from five to seven unique texts.

The videos will be primarily used for warm up activities and discussion starters, using students’ journals and online discussion boards. The primary purpose here is to let students think, wonder, and question---to expand their understanding of story, both on a universal and personal level.

Defining Narrative

This material will come primarily from our course textbook, *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing, 7th Edition*. Really, any textbook that deals with patterns of organization/modes of development will provide useful information for this unit component.

Strategies

Kagan Structures

A system for promoting collaboration and individual accountability, cultivating a positive classroom climate, and developing overall engagement, these tools have been adopted by our school district. References to shoulder partners and table groups, a central aspect of Kagan, will appear throughout the lesson plans.

Peer Conferencing

Choosing to term this “conferencing” rather than “editing” is based in a desire to help students rethink the role of feedback in improving their writing. So often, students have been permitted to simply look for proofreading errors, or to return a piece with no specific praise or constructive criticism. I ask students to engage in conversation about each other’s writing, focusing on content first and style second, and I employ a variety of methods for ensuring that they collaborate effectively in this process. At the heart of peer conferencing is the art of questioning; to equip students to do this well, a great deal of time is spent helping them learn to *dig into each other’s* ideas by asking for clarification, examples, rationales, etc.

Annotating

There are a variety of methods for doing this, but I encourage students to view annotating as a way to provide evidence of their *engagement* with the text. The general requirements involve noting/summarizing main ideas, identifying figurative and rhetorical devices, and asking questions/ “talking back” to the text. For the purposes of this unit, I would also be sure to have students identify the narrative elements as they read the model texts and jot down a thought or two about the effectiveness of these components.

Close Reading

Though it can be done using various techniques, close reading is generally seen as process for helping students “uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension.”¹⁰ It usually involves reading a text multiple times, using short passages, annotating, focusing on the text (and not preview/contextual material) and providing opportunities for discussion.¹¹ In my classroom, we frame the process around three questions: *What’s it about?* (first read), *How is it written?* (second read), and *Why does it matter?* (third read). Often, I call this *the what, the how, and the so what?*

Lessons

Note: These lessons are written in a way that can be shared directly with students. The language closely reflects what is displayed for students during class. Also, they are designed for a 90-minute class period meeting every other day throughout the year.

Lesson 1

Warm Up: What's Your Story? What are you about? What makes you tick? Gets you out of bed in the morning? What (or who, what point in time, place) defines you? What stirs your soul? Respond via your phone/computer or in your journal.

Vocab Preview: Open/Closed Form Prose; Elements of Narrative: Tension, Plot, Character, Setting, Theme, Sequencing, Flashback, Foreshadowing

Reading Review: Chapter 6 (Allyn & Bacon) Autobiographical Narrative. Share with your shoulder partner three main takeaways from Chapter 6. Decide as a pair which is the most important idea from the chapter. Class share out. One student writes responses on board. Class works together to look for patterns and draw conclusions.

In Class Write: Digging into Conflict: Moments of Contrast or Revelation. Free write about a turning point moment in your life. You might consider one of the following contrasts:

- Old self versus new self
- Old view of someone versus new view of someone
- Old value versus new value

Share your pieces via Schoology discussion board or writeabout.com

Review Final Paper for this Unit: Give students an overview of where the unit is headed, and frame up the work you will be doing by helping them understand how they will apply their learning. See this link for assignment sheet and rubric: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iO3diptSDNh4ZivUtk9EWNURDOhNYVrdSMG7vvKqG4M/edit?usp=sharing>¹²

Lesson 2

Warm Up: Read the following quote, and respond in your journal to the prompt that follows:

“Think about every bully you can remember, whether from fiction or real life. What do they all have in common? For the most part, they don’t read---and if they do, they probably aren’t ingesting much literary fiction”¹³

Prompt: What assumptions are being made about the power of fiction/reading? Agree/disagree/qualify (take a piece of both).

Understanding Story Structure: Watch Kurt Vonnegut on The Shapes of Stories: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ>

As you listen, list the various shapes Vonnegut discusses. Which of these shapes best represent(s) the types of stories with which you are familiar? Offer some examples. Share with your table group.

Exploring the Purpose of Story: In groups of three, you will choose one of the texts listed in this week’s folder on Schoology. (See Appendix C). Read your Assigned Piece. Take notes, ask questions, connect ideas to our learning, etc. Prepare a summary poster regarding the gist of the argument, points of agreement or disagreement, and questions to ponder/consider/clarify.

Presenting Posters: Review Public Speaking Protocols (Note to teachers: I use a variation of PVLEGS¹⁴, resources for which can be found through an online search). Choose a speaker to present your poster (teacher may select a number/name randomly from each group). Student will present for 90 seconds to the rest of his group, who will give feedback using the protocols. Speaker will continue presenting, making an effort to responding to the feedback he has received. Now, this speaker will stay behind and present the group’s poster to other groups as they circulate around the classroom, spending 2-3 minutes at each station.

Homework: Brainstorm Ideas for Paper 1. You may use any brainstorming format that you’d like (visuals, outlines, bullets, etc.). Be prepared to respond to the following questions tomorrow: Where are you headed? ; How does this represent your identity?; What are the key conflicts you will discuss?; How do these connect to the big idea? What tropes could you use to explain the big idea? ; How will you avoid being cliché? Which shape do you think would best fit your narrative? Why do you say that? How does the shape relate to theme/purpose?

Lesson 3

Warm Up: The Role of Story: Read the following passage, and explain what it means in your journal. Now, give an example of where you’ve seen this to be true.

Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me a truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever. Native American Proverb. ¹⁵

Vocab Preview: Connectedness, Juxtaposition, Trope

Peer Conferencing: Remember that one of our primary roles in this class is to support each other's development as writers. To that end, you will engage in a peer interview, which will ask you to *dig into* your peer's thinking. As you ask questions, listen carefully, and **take notes for your peer about his answers**. (Basically, record his thinking for him). Feel free to go "off script" as you help your classmate clarify his ideas, develop examples, justify choices, etc. Use these questions as a guide: Where are you headed? ; How does this represent your identity?; What are the key conflicts you will discuss?; How do these connect to the big idea? What tropes could you use to explain the big idea? ; How will you avoid being cliché? Which shape do you think would best fit your narrative? Why do you say that? How does the shape relate to theme/purpose?

Close Reading: "Fish Cheeks": Review the steps of close reading. Practice and model using this text.

Reviewing/Evaluating Narrative Devices: Let's identify examples of the narrative devices present in Tan's story. Now, how would we rate the effectiveness of these? (Discuss: What makes something "effective" when it comes to writing)? How could you develop one of these elements in the free write you did yesterday? How would doing this impact the narrative quality of your piece? Let's try. Share before and after examples.

In-Class Write: Begin drafting Paper 1. Start developing your piece. Focus on key areas of tension, bring characters to life, describe the primary setting(s). It does not have to fit together yet; that work can come later. Figuring out how to tie the pieces together will help you add important details, and will hopefully keep you from falling into the "and then" trap (and then this happened, and then this, etc.).

Homework: Read "Learning to Read and Write" and "Champion of the World"

Lesson 4

Warm Up: Exploring Identity: Choose ONE of these prompts and respond in your journal.

- Write about a time you felt proud of or embarrassed by your family or heritage.

- Explore ways in which your family/heritage has influenced/contributed to your identity/ worldview.
- Your only shame is to have shame. Explain what is meant here, and agree, disagree, or qualify.

Share with your table group.

Vocab Preview: Ladder of abstraction; Concrete, memory soaked, and revelatory words

Reading Check: You will have five minutes to respond to the following questions on an index card:

1. Douglass says that he used a variety of strategies to learn to read and write. List two.
2. Which word does Douglass say “broke upon [him] by degrees”? (Hint: He looked it up in the dictionary but found no help).
3. What were Bailey and Maya not allowed to do during a fight because of the noise involved?
4. How does Angelou use the key focus/conflict of this text as a metaphor of something larger?

Narrative Element and Language Analysis of Douglass and Angelou: Use the chart linked below to identify and evaluate the elements of these two model texts. Note to teachers: It may be helpful to break these texts down into smaller chunks and group students so they can complete the chart collaboratively.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jOjXjt2LCYrp0hE7lduy5SFaym4M8H2wdUNXZ_X5d0k/edit?usp=sharing

Exploring Precision in Language: Review definitions from textbook of revelatory word, memory soaked words, and ladder of abstraction. Practice using this table:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PQsYuX2Ks_G7yw3cmreqEbH7fTnZ10txCK_LeoyZ3MM/edit?usp=sharing

Look at professional texts. Pick a paragraph from our model texts. Look for examples of precise words. List them. Rewrite the paragraph you have selected by moving these words up the ladder of abstraction (making them less precise). What changes? Draw conclusions: What is the effect of precise words?

In Class-Write/Application: Let’s write revelatory words and memory soaked words. Bring your childhood to life for us by recounting a moment; focus on using

precise words to communicate setting, tone, status, etc.

Application to Paper 1/Homework: Which revelatory and memory soaked words should be featured in your paper? How about examples of tropes? How could you communicate key ideas using figurative language. Work to add these, and be ready to share tomorrow.

Lesson 5

Warm Up: Watch this video, and consider what ideas you might offer on what it means to be your age: <http://www.npr.org/2016/06/10/481291161/what-can-great-writers-teach-us-about-growing-up-and-getting-old>

As you listen, choose a quote that most sticks out to you about the power of story/the role of literature. Consider how your piece for Paper 1 captures some truth about what it means to be your age. Discuss.

Exploring Theme: Review concept of theme. Now, with your shoulder partner, generate theme statements for a nursery rhyme, movie, or novel with which you are familiar. Random share out of ideas with teacher feedback.

Now, consider the three model texts we have read in class. In your table groups, create three theme statements for each text. Choose one of these to write on the board. As a class, let's evaluate these statements for depth, clarity, and accuracy.

Choose one (or synthesize a few examples) so that each model text has one theme statement that the class accepts. Now, work with one of the texts (students may choose, or teacher may assign) to discuss how the author does/does not develop this theme effectively. Consider his/her use of characterization, setting, conflict, language, etc.

Students will share out their evaluations in front of the class., or through a carousel/gallery walk activity.

Theme and Metaphor: As a way of honing in on the theme of your own narrative, consider how you might represent the theme metaphorically. For instance, if you explore the idea of persistence in the face of trial, perhaps you would create a metaphor that compares adolescence to training for a marathon. Or you might compare yourself to a humble warrior (even consider naming one), reflecting your belief that you have much left to learn but are willing to fight for what you believe and value. Share these with your table group and respond to their questions, working to refine these metaphors and fully capture your theme.

Reflection/Homework: Considering the model texts we have reviewed---and particularly what we have examined with regard to narrative elements, language, and theme development---what goals do you have for your paper? What do you see will be important in communicating your ideas, engaging the audience, accomplishing your purpose, etc.? Work to develop your theme accordingly, and be ready to share tomorrow. Bring a complete draft of Paper 1 to class at our next meeting.

Lesson 6

Warm Up: Rethinking Style: Choose one paragraph of at least five sentences from any of the model texts we have read. (Choose a really beautiful/interesting passage). Cut and paste that into the Schoology assignment entitled "Imitation Exercise." DO NOT POST YET!

Now, choose a section of your narrative. Consider the main idea of your section, and re-write it in the exact style of the sample. Exact style=same punctuation, number of words, trope, precision, etc. Note: It will probably work better to extract the idea you are trying to convey and recreate it following the model, as opposed to just adding/deleting words and punctuation marks.

Reflect: How is your piece impacted by the changes in style? How did this process affect your writing process (attention to detail, variety, creativity, etc.)? How might you apply some of the "take aways" as you work to revise your paper?

Sharing Imitations: Review the posts of three of your classmates. Respond to their work by commenting on something specific they have done well or that you think could help them improve their imitations.

Peer Conferencing: You will now meet with four classmates of your choosing. You will meet for 10 minutes/pair, which will allow each partner to have five minutes of attention to his/her paper. Your conference should follow these steps:

1. Converse and establish a goal for your time together (it can be about a certain section of the paper, element of the rubric, area of particular difficulty, etc.). Example: I really need you to help me determine if I've made it clear how this experience impacted my identity, and if I've done so in a way that is woven smoothly throughout the piece.
2. Your partner will read with this goal in mind.
3. Your partner will give feedback while you (the writer) takes notes.
4. After five minutes, switch roles.

5. At the end of your process, thank your partner and give feedback using this peer evaluation sheet:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/17eI5Ke6D2gWH3k6QlYk7pVX9Ugs69xthSkghOIAF8DM/edit?usp=sharing>

Lab Time: You will have the remainder of class to revise your paper based on the feedback you received today in class. Highlight the changes you've made, and be ready to discuss how they have impacted your paper/how you applied specific ideas throughout the paper (and not just to the one section your peer reviewed).

Homework: Complete your revisions for our next class period. Bring an updated version to class either on Google Docs or a thumb drive. (Note to teachers: The next lesson works most smoothly if students have access to computers during class. If your students do not have access, have them bring a printed version of their draft to the next class, and follow the suggested modifications.

Lesson 7

Warm Up: Write a paragraph about anything you'd like. Here's the challenge: You may not use the following words: Is, Are, Was, Were, Of, Got/Get, Things. Share your paragraphs.

Reflect: How would you describe this activity? How did these constraints impact your thinking and influence the quality of your writing? What would be some benefits of extending these "take aways" into Paper 1?

Limiting "Dead Words" Diagnostic and Application: Choose two paragraphs from Paper 1, and do the following: Circle every use of the word "get/got." Underline every use of the word "of." Box every use of the verb to be (Am, Is, Are, Was, Were). What patterns did you detect?

Changing Issues with "Dead Words": Open Schoology, and go to the writing resources folder. Consult any of the tip sheets that are relevant based on the diagnostic you just completed. Make the recommended changes throughout Paper 1, highlighting the revisions you make as a result of this activity.

Class Whip Around Editing: Let's move the desks to form a circle. We will now complete one final class editing exercise for Paper 1. Make sure that your most current draft is pulled up on your laptop. Now, when I say go, we will move one seat in a clockwise direction. Computers will stay exactly where they are. You will read your classmate's paper and add comments/suggest revisions. Write your name in your first and last comment box. You will work for 3 minutes, and then switch. Do NOT actually

make revisions. Simply make suggestions using the Add Comments feature in Google Docs/ Word. Remember; focus your feedback first on a strength and then on an idea for growth.

Reflection: Take 10 minutes to read over the feedback your peers have given you. Look back at your piece. Is their feedback clear? Helpful? Able to be applied? If not, or you have any questions, you will have the opportunity to talk with your peer after you have read over all the comments.

Peer Conferencing: Now, confer with any peers you feel were very helpful and/or from whom you would like clarification. Do NOT leave today until you have a clear direction for revision.

Homework: Make final revisions to Paper 1. It is due to Schoology by the beginning of our next class session.

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Appendix A: Implementing District and Common Core State Standards

The unit has the primary goals of helping students understand the common elements of story, see the ways in which story can be used to recount personal experiences, connect with the larger human story in a way that articulates their distinctness without wrongly emphasizing their uniqueness, and refine their craft in telling their own story.

In terms of addressing the Common Core State Standards, this unit focuses primarily on these major skills:

In reading, students will be asked to analyze authors' choices in structuring and crafting their texts and the impact these choices have on meaning. In writing, students will be asked to construct narratives to develop real experiences using effective technique and well-chosen details. Finally, with regard to speaking and listening, students will be asked to present information in a way that listeners can follow the line of reasoning in the organization, development, and style, which must be connected to the task, purpose and audience.¹⁶

Notes

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