

Using Oral Histories to Facilitate Narrative Writing for ELL Newcomers

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Introduction and Discussion

This unit was written as part of the Delaware Teacher Institute, a subgroup of an organization created by Yale University. Written during the 2019-2020 school year, its purpose is to introduce a process for facilitating narrative writing for students by connecting the concept of a narrative to familial oral histories which are both personally and culturally relevant.

The idea of collecting students' own experiences as a starting point for language production and writing began in the 1980s with the advent of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) (Ashton-Warner, 1963)¹, which posited that whole language exposure was the best pedagogical method for helping students to produce language and eventually convert their oral language into the skills necessary for literacy. Although the LEA is now considered to be a somewhat outdated strategy for teaching reading and writing, it is certainly worth noting that experiences, particularly those generated by the student, are quite linguistically-rich opportunities to not only focus on topics meaningful to the student, but also to connect with the tradition of oral storytelling which is already so prevalent in the cultures of so many of the English as a Second Language students that I teach.

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards has made it difficult for diverse groups of students to access texts whose topics are valuable to them. As English Language Learners who are new to the country, their lack of comprehension has much deeper roots than simply gaps in vocabulary and the application of phonics. Their true issue is that they are being presented with materials based around ideas for which they have little to no background knowledge or experience. Particularly where writing is concerned, English Learners often have difficulty approaching narrative prompts that necessitate a cultural awareness which is often lost to this population of newly-arrived scholars.

In rushing to help English Language Learners to close the gap between their performance and that of native English-speaking peers, we often forget that language acquisition occurs in a very specific sequence. Reading and writing are preceded by speaking and listening skills, and student scores in literacy on the Assessment of Comprehension and Communication in English State to State (ACCESS)² support the importance of allowing students to develop their production and comprehension of oral language to serve as a springboard for the mastery of grade-level skills in reading. If students can't say what they write, they can't write what they say.

My intention with this curriculum is to utilize the trajectory of language development to help my newcomer show growth in their overall English proficiency. This is where the use of

oral histories becomes pertinent; they serve as an opportunity for students to interact with narrative through a medium that they can access.

As an ESL teacher, I am well-informed that writing is the “last skill” to develop where language acquisition is concerned. However, I am also aware that students will inevitably enter a world in which their ability to successfully navigate higher education or the workforce will be dependent upon their ability to express themselves orally and in writing to some extent. For this reason, I have chosen to focus my curriculum unit on the creation of a curriculum unit that focuses on writing as a challenging, yet attainable, skill for newcomer English Language Learners.

Background

The students whom I am teaching this unit have been placed in the newcomer program at Calvin R. McCullough Middle School in New Castle, Delaware. McCullough is a Title I school where 60% of the students come from low-income homes and about 8% are identified as English Language Learners.

Calvin R. McCullough Middle School is one of Colonial School District three intermediate schools, serving students in grades 6-12. McCullough, in addition to being Colonial’s STEAM magnet school, is also home to a newcomer program for English Language Learners. The Colonial Middle School Newcomer Program (CMSNP) is the only program of its type in the state of Delaware. Students in the Newcomer Program are transported from all three feeder schools in the district based on their language proficiency and parental approval.

Once enrolled, students are immersed in multi-grade level classrooms with other newcomer students where they are provided instruction focused on both language and content acquisition. Students spend half of their core instructional time on math and science, and half on English and social studies with myself. They attend lunch and elective classes with mainstream students.

The Newcomer Program teaches all four core content areas in the same manner as the general education program. Students are divided into two groups and spend half the day with me for ELA and Social Studies and the other half with my colleague for Math and Science. The curriculum utilizes textbooks created for ELLs by Pearson³ and National Geographic⁴, but in large part the materials used were adapted by me over several years and have been created specifically for use in this program.

All materials are differentiated for students according to their language proficiency level, ranging from entering (no English) to high beginner. Some students are just starting to acquire language and others are nearly ready to exit the program, or have already exited in other content

areas and are only taking Social Studies and ELA. Some are educated and literate in their home language, while others are not. With such varying proficiency levels, it can be challenging to find texts that provide accessible content for all students. For this reason, visual supports are imperative to my teaching and picture books are frequently chosen to convey more abstract concepts.

While this curriculum has been very successful in transitioning students to general education classes, the students' semi-isolation in courses with other ELLs for the first year or two of their studies in the United States means that they focus very specifically on writing in terms of phonemic awareness and demonstrating comprehension via evidence-based responses. This unit seeks to meld culturally responsive pedagogy with grade-level standards that focus upon producing a narrative writing piece.

Demographics

All students in the class have been living in the United States for two years or less. They are predominantly emigrants from countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean with a few students from the Middle East and Africa.

Home languages spoken include Spanish, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Kurdish, and Ga, as well as some local dialects and pigeons that exist in their native countries. Only about 75% of the students were educated in their native language. Of that number, very few are considered "on grade level" within the Common Core State Standards due to the differences in rigor and expectations that exist between the educational systems of different countries. The remaining group has little to no education in their first language, and in some cases they are not literate at all.

In addition to the language barrier, about 5% of the students are dual identified as Special Education. Their needs range from dyslexia (diagnosed in the home country) to cognitive delays, behavior issues stemming from mental health disorders.

All of the factors influencing this context further necessitate that opportunities be created for students to use and engage with language in a meaningful way. That is, all activities within the unit will be created to resemble as closely as possible the types of realistic language use applicable to transactions conducted on a daily basis. For example, describing a set of events in the past to a friend is a much more realistic use of language than simply memorizing past tense verb conjugations. While meaningful use will be discussed further in the research section of this unit, it is important to note that the emphasis that is placed on building literacy skills as a means

of accessing and acquiring grade-level content area concepts often supersedes the importance that newcomer students learn to communicate using oral language as well as the written word.

Research and Rationale

I chose to participate in the DTI seminar *Writing About Ourselves and Others* because writing is always an area of concern for stakeholders in our education system. Research has shown that English as a Second Language students required six to ten years to acquire grade-level reading and writing skills in English. (Hakuta, Goto, Butler, and Witt, 2000)⁵.

Throughout our discussions in seminar, I began to reflect on the different ways in which narratives can be presented and how models of different types of narratives could be beneficial for helping my students “get their foot in the door” with regard to completing their own narratives. In the field of English as a Second Language, it is universally accepted that writing is the final skill students acquire linguistically, both in the L1 and L2. Educators are tasked with helping English Learners develop their written expression for different purposes, including writing to inform, writing to persuade, and writing to explain. Since the first ELA unit of the school year for my middle school students includes narrative writing, I was interested in creating a unit that provided a more productive exploration of the narrative writing process for my students.

As newcomers, my students often face the misconception that they cannot write, and the use of Google Translate is the only existing support available to allow them to produce writing in elective classes. Writing fluently, let alone at grade level, is considered a skill simply too far out of reach for these students given the stark gap between their English proficiency in contrast to that of their peers.

For my intermediate-level class of newcomers (“Group B”), the simple act of writing is something that is associated with a lot of blood, sweat, and tears. As an adult undergraduate foreign language major, writing papers was difficult for me personally, even with a fully developed vocabulary and grasp of syntax and grammar in my first language (L1). My students, in contrast, are often coming to my program as the products of education systems that simply do not have the standards for resources or rigor that we have here in the United States. For this reason, they often face the challenge of attempting to produce writing that they are not even capable of generating in their L1. To counter this, writing instruction must be explicit, with a focus on structure. More importantly, it must be *meaningful* and *culturally relevant* for students.

According to Cushner (2006)⁶ “[...] This lack of cultural relevance not only results in students’ inability to comprehend specific questions, it makes the overall concept of writing instruction incomprehensible. For example, a student who is not from a culture where specific

weather and clothing patterns are associated with the seasons will not be able to generate many ideas for a narrative piece about their favorite winter activity.

For the past year, I have focused on creating curriculum for these students that meets these criteria. Students in the program now have a solid understanding of how to approach descriptive and argumentative writing as a result. Since descriptive and persuasive writing are typically more concrete in their content, I have observed that students can fairly easily generate their own ideas for these two purposes. Conversely, I have noticed that asking students to write about their own experiences is much more difficult. They often struggle with the somewhat abstract nature of articulating their own memories and feelings. Therefore, my objective in writing this new curriculum unit is to provide students with the tools to produce a meaningful, relevant, piece of narrative writing which errs less on the side of maintaining a certain structure and more on facilitating creative processes that allow the student more flexibility and identity to express themselves as an author.

The vast majority of my students represent areas of the world in which the purpose of literacy is very different. In our culture, it is essential because it "plays a major academic and social role in the formal school systems of North America. Thus, learning to read and write is perceived to be a major task for the student and a notable feature of acculturation into mainstream culture" (DeStefano, 1984). In short, connection between literacy skills and life success is not a value universal to the collectivist cultures from which they come. Collectivist cultures, by definition, "stresses the importance of the community, while individualism is focused on the rights and concerns of each person" (Cherry, 2018)⁷. This becomes a challenge with respect to narrative writing, where students are required to detail events and perspectives that are solely their own. My newcomers are so accustomed to thinking of themselves in the context of a group, they are often at a loss to describe their own characteristics or personality traits beyond, "I am a good person, I help others."

Given the unusual relationship that my students have with literacy (or lack thereof), I began to consider more culturally relevant ways to help students express themselves in narrative form. One of the aspects of my students' background that always factors into my considerations for writing instruction is that many of them are accustomed to being assessed using oral prompts instead of written ones. Moreover, many of the cultures from which my students come carry a strong tradition of oral storytelling passed down through members of the same ethnic group or family. According to Johnson (2006)⁸, many areas of the world that lack widespread literacy or a commonly acceptable writing system rely on oral histories to preserve the different values that make up their culture. This knowledge can be applied to the design of research-based instruction, which language acquisition theory tells us needs to be 1) linguistically comprehensible to the learner and 2) interesting to the learner (Krashen, 1982). Since English Language Learners frequently have prior experience with oral histories stemming from their own families and

communities, it seemed only logical to center my unit around utilizing oral histories as a springboard to narrative writing. As stated by Montero (2012), “Using oral history methodology to support ELLs’ language development in general and writing development specifically, actively incorporates the students’ voices into their English language learning process...”. It is through the familiarity of this method of storytelling that my unit seeks to give newcomer students a voice that is seldom otherwise given the chance to be heard.

The main framework for this unit is the Language Experience Approach (LEA). As described in the first section of this unit, the LEA utilizes the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills that students have in English to communicate about ideas with which they are highly familiar or have had some recent experience. Van Allen (1961) summarized the LEA as “What I can say, I can write. What I can write, I can read. I can read what I write and what other people can write for me to read”. This is the crux of the connection between using oral histories to support the teaching of narrative writing for English Language Learners; many of my students know what they want to say, but somewhere between their brain and the paper it seems to get lost. Narrative writing is a struggle when your words can’t seem to make it to the paper. Ergo, students will begin this unit about narrative writing without actually picking up a pencil--they will then work throughout the course of this unit to shift the medium for their storytelling from speaking to print.

Content Objectives

The English Language Arts standards for written expression focus on the production of three purposes of writing: informative, persuasive, and narrative. Each purpose is taught as a separate unit at the middle school level. The content in this unit will address the anchor standard for English Language Arts as follows:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Although my students are not using the same texts as their peers in general education classes, they are still focusing on differentiated lessons aligned to the grade level Common Core and Delaware State Standards for grades 6, 7, and 8 respectively. Since this unit is unique in that it is intended for a classroom with multiple grade levels represented, it will allow students to place emphasis on the specific standards of their grade level as connections to the WIDA English Language Development Standards, rather than the typical practice of focusing more intently on content standards with the language component as a secondary priority. For the purpose of the very specific population represented by the newcomer program, it is necessary to note that from

a linguistic perspective students are producing work more consistent with the grade 3-4 common core standard rather than its counterpart at their own grade level.

The WIDA performance indicators provide expectations for what students should be doing with language in order to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in each of the four domains (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) at their given proficiency and specifies the connection that each performance description has to a grade level content standards. Using the WIDA rubrics for *Standard 1: Language of Social Interaction Content Objectives* and *Standard 2: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts*, I have selected the following Common Core State Standards for each grade. In order to ensure that the learning outcomes were appropriate for each grade represented in the class, I selected standards for each grade level, which are nearly identical to one another:

Grade 6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grade 7

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grade 8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

My overall goal with this unit is for students to demonstrate their growth in mastering the grade level standards for narrative writing through multimodal instruction.

Learning Objectives

This unit will introduce the concept of narrative writing and culminate in students producing their own narrative piece. The way in which I have structured this unit is based upon the work of Montero (2012) conducted research on the use of a similar method with newcomer English Language Learners in Canada and found that “By encouraging students to talk, write, and publish their life stories others might gain insight into these students’ lives and gain knowledge to validate their prior sources of knowledge”. With this in mind, the unit will divide learning

objectives into three parts: 1) Introduction to narratives, 2) The connection between an oral history and narrative, 3) Using an oral history to craft a written narrative.

The Traditional Narrative

As an introduction to the characteristics and purpose of narrative writing, the unit will begin with the study of short excerpts from chapter 4 of Frank McCourt's famed memoir *Angela's Ashes*⁹, where he recounts his experience in making his first communion. Students will analyze how McCourt uses first person point of view as well as vivid sensory detail to create a more "stereotypical" memoir that is descriptive of the author's experience growing up as an immigrant between the US and Ireland. This part of the unit will serve as an introduction to the narrative genre of writing and the more traditional approach of a narrative as a written piece told in the first person. While McCourt's work is quite obviously too lexically advanced for my students to read in its entirety, with support it can be made accessible. I chose to begin with this text instead of a more "watered down" option because the overall themes and experiences detailed are strong models of what a truly meaningful narrative is. Since most of my students come from backgrounds where they have experienced war, poverty, displacement, natural disasters, etc. I specifically chose a section that focused on McCourt's first holy communion because it is an experience that quite a few of my students, being from catholic countries, have had themselves. I ultimately wanted to expose them to the ways in which a young immigrant not unlike themselves used narrative writing to convey his similar struggles. This first section of the unit will implement the Reading Apprenticeship¹⁰ method "Talking to the Text" (described in more detail below) to generate student centered discussion about the text.

Following the excerpt reading, students will have a direct mini-lesson take notes on the seven parts of a narrative as follows:

1. Characters (Protagonist and Antagonist)
2. Setting
3. Plot
4. Conflict
5. Climax
6. Narrator
7. Conclusion

Following this introduction to the concept of narrative writing, students will analyze excerpts from a more lexically-manageable perspective. Students will also be given an opportunity to brainstorm about the experiences they recall from their childhood, either within the education system, or the family and community in which they were raised before coming to the United States. Following this period for self-reflection, students will work in pairs to read

interview excerpts by the author, motivational speaker/former Pakistani refugee Malala Yousafzai to evaluate how Yousafzai tells her story using details that enable the listener to envision the events that she recounts. Students will then compare the spoken interviews to excerpts from the young reader's adaptation of *I am Malala*¹¹ by Malala Yousafzai to gain an understanding of narrative writing on a more lexically-appropriate level. Students will examine two modes of storytelling to identify examples of the similarities that exist between the two.

Multimedia Narratives

Moving to the second learning objective, the unit will build a connection between oral storytelling and the written narrative. In the second stage of this unit, students will be introduced to oral histories and generate examples of how oral histories can look in various contexts. Montero (2012)¹² described oral history methodology as a practice that "...[validates students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective". To acquaint themselves with oral histories, students will analyze the different mediums through which oral histories can be communicated. The stereotypical picture of an oral history is that of a group of people sitting in front of a campfire telling their grandchildren stories about "walking to school uphill both ways". However, to truly be able to equate an oral history as one manifestation of a narrative, students need to understand that they can be presented in many different forms. Students will view oral histories from the multimedia stage production *And Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank*¹³, available on YouTube. This unique theatrical production intertwines videos of Holocaust survivors narrating their own experiences with footage of stage actors (depicting the survivors' middle school-aged personas) intermittently performing scenes of their narrations. In studying these three variations of narratives told through text, interview, and video recording, students will analyze the connection between an oral and written narrative. Using these models, students will conclude this portion of the unit by recording their own oral histories on Flipgrid, focusing on an important event in their life. This project will subsequently serve as a starting point for their own narrative writing later in the unit.

Graphic Narratives

The final segment of the unit will pull all permutations of narratives together by first introducing graphic novels as yet another form of narrative writing. While picture supports have long been a staple in supporting the written expression of English Language Learners, there is relatively little information available on the use of "comic strip" style illustrations. As a model, students will read Raina Telgemeier's award-winning graphic novel *Smile*¹⁴. A relatable mentor text for students, Telgemeier's work details her experiences and struggles as a sixth-grade student who is grappling with common problems for the age group, from boy issues to orthodontia. The novel includes graphics depicting each part of the story, supporting readers in

empathizing with the main character. As students read, they will again use the Reading Apprenticeship method of “Talking to the Text” to examine how the graphics support the reader’s comprehension of the main character’s feelings and motivations.

In the culminating project of the unit, students will combine their newfound knowledge of oral histories and narrative writing to draft their own personal narrative utilizing the mediums we have examined. The process for creating this written narrative will occur in the following three segments:

1. As authors, they will first revisit the oral history version of their narrative from part two of the unit, which represents some life event of importance to them. Their oral history will become a dictation for the first draft of their written personal narrative. Using Filpgrid¹⁵, the students will transcribe their story, making any changes necessary for the piece to remain coherent between speech and text.
2. Students will evolve from authors to editors, following an editing and revision process of their first draft. Daily lessons will incorporate narrative writing conventions, including basic punctuation, utilizing quotation marks to write dialogue, and elements of plot.
3. Finally, students will become illustrators of their own graphic narratives. Using the website *Storybird*¹⁶, students will choose their own “comic strip” style images to accompany and embellish their personal narrative.

As students work to create their personal narrative, their final project will be evaluated using a rubric including the following criteria:

1. Selecting an appropriate topic for a personal narrative (i.e., not copying a movie/book)
2. Writing/speaking in first person versus third person point of view
3. Using descriptive adjectives to provide details about a narrative’s characters and setting
4. Incorporating dialogue between characters using quotation marks
5. Crafting a sequential plot with appropriate elements, i.e. an exposition, climax, etc.
6. Concluding the narrative with thoughts that indicate why they chose to share it
7. Evaluating what their topic choice tells the reader about them as an author and a person

To help students draw upon oral histories as a basis for their narrative, they will first review the oral history that they created in the second part of this unit. In a one-on-one conference with the teacher, they will discuss why the event they recounted was significant for them, and how their sentiments can be expressed through descriptions of sight, smell, taste, hearing, and feeling that shift their medium to the written word. Students will work with the teacher to complete a graphic organizer which contains their thoughts as articulated through these sensory mediums.

Having spoken about their oral history, students will then use this graphic organizer to put the practice of “writing what you say” (as mentioned earlier in the unit) into action by crafting a narrative that allows the reader as close a sense as possible of what they student felt during that given event, and why it was important to them. While the language in and of itself may not be the most complex or poetic, the final writing piece should reflect the student’s best attempt at pulling their audience into their memory in a way that is relatable and comprehensible.

Strategies

Along with my considerations regarding the theory of language acquisition and textual content, I knew I wanted to create something that utilized the basic methodologies of teaching ESL. While many programs rely heavily on the use of translation and computers to convey meaning of grade-level texts to students, I see them as a tool which can often become a crutch if overused. If students never learn to negotiate meaning in the second language, they will have a difficult time increasing proficiency.

Visual Supports

The literature incorporated in the unit will appear primarily in English include a strategy vital to any teacher of English Language Learners: visual support. While the picture books, by Common Core Standards, are not considered middle school level texts, the students will have the opportunity for exposure to more rigorous ones in the form of excerpts from larger works. As previously mentioned, Krashen (1981)¹⁷ states that students require comprehensible input in order to increase their language proficiency. This means that information presented in a lesson needs to be $i + 1$, or just slightly above their ability to comprehend at their present proficiency level, but ultimately accessible through the use of accompanying visual aids, video clips, audio, etc. The texts described above are all accompanied by rich imagery which supports comprehension.

Chunking

Texts will be presented in manageable chunks rather than as a whole. Separating reading materials into smaller sections is a proven method to increasing comprehension, especially for students who are still mastering fluency or lack the vocabulary necessary for comprehension (Casteel, 1988)¹⁸. In some cases, texts will be limited to certain excerpts which have been selected to focus on key vocabulary words and main ideas which will help students to more easily access the learning objectives. In addition to presenting students with chunked text, they will also utilize pre-reading strategies of identifying and defining unfamiliar words, using graphic organizers, and creating pictures to demonstrate comprehension.

Reading Apprenticeship

The Reading Apprenticeship program is an instructional method created by non-profit organization WestEd that supports the socio-emotional and cognitive needs of students as a means of helping the students to build background and use prior knowledge in order to engage with and think critically about texts across content areas. Reading Apprenticeship is comprised of several different instructional routines which allow students to interact with text using metacognitive skills.

One of the routines that will be applied throughout this curriculum unit is “Talking to the Text”. “Talking to the Text” is a version of annotation in which students first notice and record their own “inner conversation” as annotations in the margins while reading the text for the first time. Then, the students share their metacognitive process by discussing their annotations in groups. Finally, the class discusses their annotations as a whole group while the teacher acts as a resource rather than the center of instruction. Using the “Talking to the Text” routine is a way of simultaneously activating English Learner Students’ higher order thinking skills while also involving use of their language skills to comprehend the text.

Flipgrid

Hockley & Dudeney (2007)¹⁹ propose three questions to evaluate whether the use of technology is effective for vocabulary instruction with English Language Learners: “Are we increasing their motivation and engagement?”, “Are we allowing them to practise and produce language in useful ways in class?” and lastly, “Are we giving them the opportunity to take their language learning out of the classroom and have extra exposure to English?” My context will meet all three of these criteria by providing students with a way to interact meaningfully with language in a way that closely mirrors the ways in which they use it in real life through the use of Flipgrid. Flipgrid is a YouTube-esque app that allows students to make short vlog-style recordings of themselves speaking, which are then posted to a forum within the application which only the students and myself can access. This tool is perfect for English Language Learners because it has a maximum time limit for recording, and includes a feature that students can use to comment on their classmates’ videos. This lowers the affective filter by keeping students’ expressions to short bursts, as well as removing the anxiety of asking students to present their ideas in the traditional whole group presentation.

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a pedagogical methodology developed by Asher (1969)²⁰. This strategy teaches new vocabulary by requiring students to respond physically with gestures, props, etc. to input that they hear in the second language. Asher purports that students

are more likely to process and internalize language when they involve a simultaneous response from the central nervous system. Total Physical Response can be as simple as one gesture to indicate the meaning of a verb, or a whole series of commands students must follow to pantomime the actions of characters in a text.

StoryBird

Storybird.com is a website that offers free and pre-created illustrations that students can use in conjunction with their own writing. The types of illustrations offered range from templates for storybooks, comic strips, and more extensive chapter-length writing. The styles of the images vary, including options that feature realistic-looking people, as well as animals and other nondescript creatures that evoke an almost *Maus*-like²¹ sentiment when displayed with student writing. The use of StoryBird will not only add an engaging, creative aspect to the unit's culminating project, but also remove the frequent complaint of students in regards to writing that they "don't know how to draw that". Framing their writing in terms of a comic strip also helps to prevent the project from becoming too overwhelming.

Activities

Since the main goal of my classroom is to facilitate the acquisition of language through a communicative approach, students will spend a minimal amount of time as "receptacle" of information and instead use language to examine concepts in a meaningful way and engage their critical thinking skills to process ideas being presented in the second language (L2). In some cases, differentiated versions of materials will be provided to ensure language does not hinder comprehension of the content. Scaffolded materials may or may not include simplified English versions of worksheets or versions including first language support. The activities will incorporate all four domains of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) to ensure that students develop all aspects of their language proficiency throughout the unit.

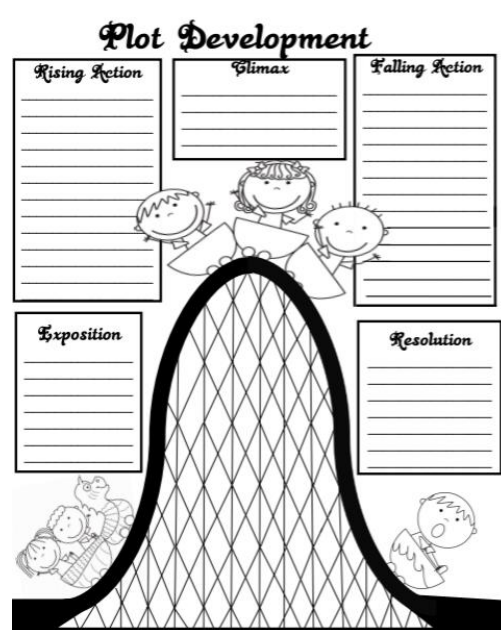
Information Gap

Following their reading of an *Angela's Ashes* excerpt and introduction to the components of a narrative, students will manipulate the input by helping each other understand the main characteristics of a narrative. In this activity, students will receive a graphic organizer packet with boxes for each of the seven components of a narrative. Each student's packet will have a different one of the seven boxes completed for them, detailing one of the characteristics covered in the unit. Students will be given time to read their completed organizer and to ask the teacher any questions about it. Then, students will move about the room and find a student who has a different completed box from them. They will first make note of that student's name on the corresponding page of their packet, to ensure they do not speak with the same person twice.

Next, they will explain the information completed page of their organizer to the other student, allowing time for the student to copy the notes onto their own blank. Once they have done so, they will have an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions before moving on to find a different student with a different completed page that they lack. They will repeat this process until their entire packet is completed and they have reinforced the new concepts by explaining and discussing them multiple times with other students.

Plot Element Rollercoaster

In addition to the direct instruction that students will receive on the components of a narrative, students will also learn the elements of a plot. To introduce this concept, students will be provided with a pre-filled plot element graphic organizer presented as a rollercoaster, created by Gay Miller for the teaching materials website Teachers Pay Teachers²² (pictured below).



Students will then have a five minute mini-lesson on each of the plot elements as follows: (1) *exposition (the beginning, introduces the narrator)*, (2) *complication (something changes in the life of the narrator)*, (3) *rising action (events after the complication)* (4) *climax (the most problematic event)* (5) *falling action (events after the climax)* (6) *conclusion (resolution of the plot)*

After the mini-lesson, students will work in pairs to read a condensed version of *Little Red Riding Hood*²³. After reading, partners will work to complete an assigned part of the “roller coaster ride” by filling in the graphic organizer using the correct part of the text. Students will

then come back together to review their organizers as a class. If a group's element of the plot is not correctly identified, students must return to their partners and work together to revisit the text. Following their adjustment, they will repeat the process of reviewing with the whole group. No group's work is complete until all parts of the "roller coaster ride" are correct on each student's paper.

Oral Storytelling

Students will be asked to reflect on a specific, important event in their life. These may range from a memorable birthday, holiday, or vacation. They will begin by completing a reflection sheet detailing the specifics of the situation they will talk about. They will use a concept web-style chart to make notes under the following subtopics: *who was there?*, *what did they say or do that was memorable?*, *what senses were involved?* *how did it make you feel/react?*. Students with lower levels of English language proficiency will draw and label pictures under each section in lieu of writing notes. Then, using sentence stems created using the same language as the concept web, students will film an individual vlog of about 1-3 minutes in length (depending on student proficiency) on Flipgrid about their experience. The vlog will be viewed by only the teacher, and the teacher will then meet privately with each student to discuss how they can improve both the content of their message and the mechanics of their language use. This will be one of several uses of the vlogging activity to allow students to build confidence in their speaking as well as their understanding of crafting an oral narrative similar to those they saw in *And Then They Came for Me*. Students will repeat this activity three times over the course of the unit in order to prepare them for their longer, more detailed oral narrative at the end of the unit's second section.

Role Play

The students will be divided into groups to roleplay a scenario one of the narrative excerpts we have read in either *Smile* or *I Am Malala*. First, two of the students will use a provided script to perform their group's scenario. Then, they will work with their group to alter it by creating a written narrative that represents the scene exemplified in their role play. Students will focus on adding details and bringing the scripted scenario to life through a paragraph written in the first person.

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Appendix

I selected the following Common Core State Standards for each grade level:

Grade 6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grade 7

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grade 8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

The unit will primarily focus on Common Core ELA Anchor Standard Four: *“Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.”* It will be divided into three general sections focusing on the following **Essential Questions**: (1) What are the characteristics of narrative writing? (2) What different mediums of narrative writing exist And (3) How can writers use the varying permutations of narrative writing to share their experiences? Students will complete the unit with an understanding of the characteristics and forms of narrative writing, the varying approaches to narrative writing, and how to use these concepts to present their own life experiences to an audience, both as a means of self-expression and of drawing comparison between the human experience through written and oral presentation.

The **Enduring Understandings** for this unit are based off of the Common Core standards for students in grades 6-8 as they relates to the concepts of writing and textual analysis. Following this unit, students will recognize the *basic characteristics of narrative writing*. They will know that *narrative writing can take many forms*. They will understand that *writers can utilize different mediums to create narratives, including oral storytelling as a vehicle for conveying personal experiences and feelings*.

Students will work simultaneously throughout the unit to develop their written English. They will be able to use their oral and written language to identify the characteristics of a narrative, analyze different types of narratives for both content and meaning, and use narrative writing as a tool to express feelings, thoughts, and life experiences that they find worthy of sharing with the world.

Notes

¹ ISBN: 0671617680

² <https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access>

³ Schifini, Alfredo, Deborah Short, and Josefina Villamil. Tinajero. High point. Success in language, literature, content.

⁴ Lawlor, LeeAnn, and Julie Mariscal. Longman social studies.

⁵ "How Long Does It Take English Learners To Attain Proficiency?."

<https://eric.ed.gov/?ID=ED443275>

⁶ <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267.n264>.

⁷ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-collectivistic-cultures-2794962>

⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13696850600750350>

⁹ ISBN: 978-0684842677

¹⁰ <https://readingapprenticeship.org/>

¹¹ ASIN: B00H25FFLA

¹² Exploring Oral History as a Support for SIFE

<https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jaal.318>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSg8fUZmrr0>

¹⁴ ISBN: 0545132061

¹⁵ <https://info.flipgrid.com/>

¹⁶ <https://storybird.com/>

¹⁷ Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ Casteel, C. A. (1988). Effects of chunked reading among learning disabled students: An experimental comparison of computer and traditional chunked passages. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 17(2), 115-121.

¹⁹ Dudeney, G., Hockly, N., & Pegrum, M. (2013). *Digital Literacies - Research and Resources in Language Teaching*. Harlow, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited.

²⁰ Asher, J. J. (1969). The total physical response approach to second language learning. *The modern language journal*, 53(1), 3-17.

²¹ ISBN: 978-0679406419

²² <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Free-Printable-Plot-Development-Anchor-Chart-1400675>

²³ <https://americanliterature.com/childrens-stories/little-red-riding-hood>