

Writing for Your Life

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Introduction

Imagine a classroom where students can “come of age” by exploring their own passage into maturity via great authors, true stories, ancient myths and most importantly, through personal narrative. My unit, *Writing for Your Life*, is an attempt to showcase a comprehensive multi-genre Language Arts curriculum for high school students that they will feel is germane and important to their lives. Linking students to the texts we read and discuss by means of their own creation of text is what makes this unit work. The lessons intertwine multi-genre studies in reading and writing with a focus on ‘mirroring’ the students in my classroom. In other words, we will read nonfiction and fiction literature from, about, by and pertinent to teenagers’ lives. Our writing will originate from our own personal accounts and storytelling in order to document and explore ‘who we are’ and ‘where we stand’ -- moment to moment -- over the course of freshman year.

Arguably, the beginning of ‘finding oneself’ begins in ninth grade. And so my unit begins on day one where yearlong essential questions are raised such as: *who am I? where am I in my journey to find out? who do I want to be?* Thematic threads -- significant to the coming-of-age teenager -- are what hold this unit together. The fabric -- a blended approach of writing and reading from and through multiple genres, with a heavy emphasis on personal narrative -- is what renders our responses to the big questions. *Writing for Your Life* merges all genre forms and styles centered on unified and highly apropos topics. As opposed to teaching each concept in isolation, say a poetry or nonfiction unit, for instance, this curriculum zeroes in on notions like ‘growing up in America today,’ as witnessed through poems, memoirs, blogs, diaries, short stories and articles, written by published authors and then, the students themselves!

Writing for Your Life will be taught to 93 freshmen in a brand new public high school in the northernmost point of the Charlotte Mecklenburg School system in North Carolina’s Mecklenburg County. From a community which has seen over a decade of steady growth in population and infrastructure, especially in the school’s specific zone, students come from all walks and backgrounds. The sleepy suburban and lakefront neighborhoods once connected by two lane state roads are now interwoven and heavily populated with new residents, businesses and development. While the majority of the student make-up is caucasian, the high school serves a substantial population of African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and Middle Eastern students as well. Because the school is in it inaugural year, the state “report card” in terms of test scores and ultimate demographics is still to be determined.

While the ideas in this unit can be implemented as a whole or in part, my intention is to set forth a way of *being* in the classroom, a way of teaching and learning where reading, writing, talking and thinking are integrated into the daily culture as we not only meet the minimum guidelines for the course (this unit can encompass all of NC’s English I standards, *see Appendix*), but *transcend* the competencies into something unforgettable: a celebration and labor of passion

as we write (and read) for our lives!

My Rationale

Why would anyone want to listen to what a teenager has to say about identity, growing up or life? I know many colleagues who would argue that high school students shouldn't be asked these questions because they don't have the answers yet (--they just think they do!). Indeed, our standard public high school English classrooms focus instead and still, on high stakes test-taking literacy skills, the five paragraph essay and highly structured writing and reading assignments which often have little application to students' 'real' lives. Concentration on external knowledge sources and impersonal writing, on measurable data and conforming parameters might allow for consistency in curriculum, but it falls short when the individual student is taken into account. Will my students remember, value and be able to use what they learn?

This is where I pause. My experience tells me it is my work to find connection points for my students and to meet them where they are. It also informs my choices when I can see what has mattered and lasted for my students as they venture forth. This would include all types of learners, all manner of demographic backgrounds, and the many destinations for which my freshmen are bound --be it college, trade school, the military or the workforce. And while these teens are indeed developmentally in an ego-centric place with little worldly experience and loads of false confidence, this is precisely why it is important to listen to them...and, I might add, to question, delve, elicit and solicit. Going from the personal to the universal, the internal to the external, the known to the unknown has always been an effective way to scaffold learning. By asking fourteen year olds to reflect on their childhood, or to question and identify their core beliefs, or to place themselves on their own map of their journey to maturity, I can help highlight and make conscious the journey itself.

A curriculum aligned with state standards and goals, but also to which students can relate and connect is essential then. What we concentrate on must be vital and worth paying attention to because it serves a purpose. At a time when our own culture is found lacking when it comes to honoring and investing in rites of passage for our young people, I think we owe it to these budding adults to acknowledge, highlight and take advantage of such a significant and universal turning point. Today, when initiation into "adulthood" means getting a driver's license at sixteen, a voter's registration card at eighteen and being legally allowed to drink at twenty-one, many students have not been challenged to consider what they make of their (universal) growing pains and growth spurts. When a student begins to see a common link to other fourteen year olds in the world and throughout time, comparing initiations into adulthood, they are able to become more metacognitive and self-aware vs. self conscious and self-centered. By asking a student to start with their own mixed bag of thoughts as they debate and determine their stance, they come to know why and where their opinions, beliefs and perceptions are formed as they are. This is where my unit goes beyond the standards and tests for which we will be preparing, and hopefully prepares each student for something even greater: growing up.

Last, I believe the ninth grade course of study -- with its heavy focus on genre -- lends itself well to a blended curriculum, where high-interest, thematic writing and reading go hand in hand, with many of our texts serving as models for students to imitate. Whether it be a poem to

introduce ourselves in August, a recording of our *This I Question* statements, a mini-memoir in the manner of Sandra Cisneros, my students will be more successful working through the steps to emulate effective writing. Juxtaposing genres is an ideal way to learn how, when and why each type can be effective. I believe students come to a deeper understanding -- from the mind of a writer -- when they see genre as a *choice* the writer makes. Writing from our own experiences, perspectives and opinions allows young writers to not only connect but to take risks with their writing. Therefore, in each of these cases, I cannot stress enough the value of a vehicle like personally charged, carefully selected content and themes which speak to students' lives. Even Joseph Campbell's work on the 'mono myth' (aka hero's journey) and an introduction to archetypes can become personal for my students when they begin to assign themselves to the stages and roles they act out in their own young lives. I believe the more I can get my students to see themselves in my classroom, the more apt they are to willingly and, more importantly, meaningfully participate in their education.

Objectives

My Goals for Students *plus* Essential Questions:

Identification with writers & application of genre styles

-- especially teenaged authors, youthful narrators -- and subjects related to growing up, identity and making our way in the world...

How are they like you? In what ways are they different from you, in your reality? How did the author tell his/her story? Compare and contrast the figured worlds of what you read to your own. Tell your own story -- like - or - differently from the text we read.

Comprehension & application of genre techniques

-- as tools for the teenage and everyday writer, and as a reflection of language and culture...

What is genre and what kinds of genre do we use and know best in our daily lives? How does genre make a difference when it comes to self expression? to audience? to purpose? Imitate -- even create or 'mash' -- genres.

Synthesis of themes through writing personal narrative

-- as a tool for thinking-through, this becomes a crossover for future writing, in school and out...

Who are you? How do place, social milieu and roles shape who we are? Where are you in your own 'odyssey?' How do you know? Choose a genre (or two or more) to express identity or ideas effectively for various audiences.

Judgment & Evaluation of concepts

-- as a way to become critical thinkers and metacognitive in our learning, encourages considered learning, awareness and informed opinion-making...

Do we ever lose our innocence? If you are experienced, are you mature? What does it mean to be a hero? How is a hero made? Do we need heroes? Are all human lives like a journey?

Curriculum Unit Description

Writing for Your Life is a yearlong, overarching unit, centered around selected literature and themes, created to help students see relationship through and between their own writing and what they encounter in their Freshman English class. Daily writing in a Writer's Notebook will provide students with a place to play, ponder, practice, postulate and pirate various types of writing, in myriad genres, following diverse forms. When we encounter new or in-depth ideas, students will respond and reflect in their own voice, telling their own stories, making their own tie-ins. As students set out to study genre, they will not only read -- but write -- in the assorted styles and for different purposes and audiences. By doing so, I believe students will come to feel more empowered in their verbal expression and will be able to evaluate other's writing for effectiveness. Filling their Writer's Notebook with their own text -- stories, connections, thoughts, views and solutions -- makes it worth holding onto long after freshman year.

This writing unit will be embedded in a standard public high school English I classroom, but can be used in any classroom where reading and writing skills are taught. Prepared as a ten month unit, lessons are created for ninth grade English students, with special emphasis on reading a variety of genre selections from the perspective of young people. In this case, a merging of courses (Foundations of English- first semester and English I - second semester), occupied by the same students all year long, meets daily for 90 minutes each class. As the year unfolds, student's writing will become the fodder for discussions, lengthier writings, projects and in-depth studies on text and/or themes.

The Unit: Teaching Strategies

If you were to walk into my classroom, you would no doubt notice the bare walls adorned only with torn, black poster paper offering chalky white handwritten quotes. "We are the stories we tell" -- "How can I know what I think about what I know unless I tell a story about it?" -- "We are the ones we've been waiting for" and "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" flank the walls and boards introducing some of our immediate themes. These quotes underscore *Identity*, *The Heroic Journey* and *Coming of Age*, recurring "big ideas" for my English I classes. Themes interweave the activities, mini-units, and lessons in reading, writing and speaking. They hold and enrich the texts and genres we read and consider. Anchoring and framing our work, the theme is interchangeable, however. The themes stitch the fabric of a writing program emphasizing personal narrative as vehicle for all other writing, embellished by a myriad of genres and authors.

My chief concern is keeping students intent on the work of becoming empowered self-expressive, critical thinkers through a thematically linked writing and reading curriculum. What matters is high interest for my audience (my students) and relevance of the subject matter we study (the ultimate purpose). Each day, students will be expected to read and write. Depending on the lessons for study, the topics and strategies may change according to need, purpose and schedule.

PRACTICE

Confidence in writing and the development of skills comes from repetition and ample opportunity to write. Many of my students are resistant until they understand the requests are fair, usually short and focused...and most importantly; they are for practice only. Plus, most students want to write about themselves, what they know and their own opinions, perspectives and experiences. For instance, during a study of memoir writing, I may include warm-up prompts for guiding some of their reading and writing (like *roles we play* or *Now that you understand the figured worlds in which we live, choose one and choose 10 'commandments' for it*). I may use 'mentor texts,' excerpts from various high-interest teen memoirs, for a week to give students lots of practice at trying many styles before they launch into their own (like *having read three different authors describe a mentor who appeared in their lives at just the right moment, write about your own guides or teachers*). Next, I might offer up poetry or letters, diary entries or Facebook profiles to copy from in our notebooks in order to examine the different ways we share our identity and how different styles and genre-formats function.

PONDER

Reflection must be woven into student writing in equal measure to their forays into genre in order to underscore the importance of writing as a way to *think*. All the while, I will be asking students to write commentary on these texts, as well as on their peer's and their own work. Where possible, I like to ask students to state their ideas and provide anecdotes to illustrate them, from reading about others' formative experiences with learning to write and sharing our own in the same manner, to stopping at the end of class to complete an Exit Ticket on three things learned in class that day.

Writing is a way of knowing and thinking through so much of what we do! For example, while we study archetypes found in global folktales and myths, I may ask students to choose archetypes they see at play in their own lives currently. Finding common roles, like the "student," "lover" and "child," we might then share these and mull over the patterns we notice emerging in our class community. I may refer to our readings of nonfiction pieces focused on 'forbidden love & friendship,' articles about teen soldiers in South Africa and a documentary about teens in the Gaza Strip, Jews & Arabs, and ask students to construct a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting their American experiences with teens from other cultures or write a letter to these characters, some of whom are real people!

PLAY

An element often missing in writing instruction is play. Writing can be fun and funny. In order to stimulate critical thinking habits, it is important to offer students options to experiment, use their imaginations and to make connections...especially when studying genre, audience and purpose. Students could "mash up" two or more types of genres. I could ask them to see what happens when they take a poem like William Carlos Williams "This Is Just to Say" and write their own apology on a post-it note for the refrigerator. Or, when they write in the narrative voice of Scout from *To Kill A Mockingbird* but place it in the context of the objectivity of court room transcripts. Notes on the historical background of Homer's *Odyssey* could be re-written as a wordle, a book jacket cover or news cast. Even the study of grammar can be playful when

students complete and eventually create their own “Mad Libs,” combining a sort of ‘guided narrative’ with blanks waiting for separately brainstormed parts of speech. And dramatic readings of a previously read speech or poem -- where students must read with attitude -- brings the notion of tone home. From sarcastic to mournful to wistful, the class always laughs at these renderings. They get it!

POSTULATE

Students will be asked to take a stand, state their opinions and elaborate on their understandings before, during and after a unit of study. For instance, while examining the notion of ‘rites of passage,’ I may ask students to define and describe those which are familiar or those they have gleaned from family histories (eg. confirmation in church, initiation into gangs or clubs, etc.). Once we have looked at rites in other cultures and have explored those in the U.S., I will once again, ask students to perhaps defend and suggest what they consider to be meaningful maturation thresholds. After reading and writing about moments of “passage,” I would again have students return to their notebooks to create a new rite of passage for themselves and their peers. Even the most reluctant students sit up and enjoy class debates; little do they know how important the preparation is to winning an argument, at first; but they quickly catch on and crack the books for evidence! If a student is to presume their lives ARE a quest, it is fascinating to see what they come up with as their ‘holy grail’ and their ‘dragon’ to slay!

PIRATE

Good writers are often good thieves. When we use the poem, “Where I’m From” as a mentor text and essentially copy the form and structure, themes and arc of the original, we are stealing good ideas to make our own poetic creations. We will use our Writer’s Notebooks throughout our lessons to imitate other writer’s works. Hopefully, this practice will allow students to begin to shape their style and confidence as young writers. Students feel more at ease when they are initially immersed in a model which speaks to them; the success of using online podcasts and sites, like National Public Radio’s “This I Believe,” entries from *Freedom Writers Diary* or YouTube videos of Poetry Jams points to this. All of these sources contain real life, youthful voices talking about what matters to them. Just sharing engaging examples like these goes a long way toward getting my students hooked and invested in sharing their own voice. Ultimately, I like to see my students go from imitation to launching into their own versions of writing for the classroom and for themselves.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

A Way of Knowing: The Writer’s Notebook

Central to our writing work this year, my students will keep a Writer’s Notebook, in the manner of Ralph Fletcher’s “daybooks,” which suggests this as a place to ‘contain’ and ‘spark’ original writing. From day one, students will set up a hard-bound, marble composition notebook that will become an integral part of our work on our writing and thinking. This notebook will be the place for daily writing, as well as an organizational tool for both students and teacher to track the progression of our writing and lessons. Once more, this notebook is a work-in-progress

mimicking the students' blossoming sense of awareness throughout the unit.

Because I want to use texts to ignite our writing, I will frequently provide students with quotations, poems, song lyrics, newspaper articles, e-mails, letters, pictures and more. These hand-outs will be pasted with glue sticks into the Writer's Notebook (I like the idea of using left-handed pages for these pieces), and then students will be asked to write based on these selections. I may ask students to simply respond, or to take a stand or add a new element (a beginning, ending, new narrative) to the piece. Depending on my objective in the lesson, I will use this strategy to set the tone or to provide individual time to write. Furthermore, the writing exercises we do in the notebook serve as springboards and fuel for more formal and polished pieces, from essays to projects to research papers.

Not for notes, vocabulary lists or quizzes, the notebook becomes a physical representation of the writer's journey through the year. It is a metacognitive space too, moving back and forth between writing about ourselves and then writing about ourselves as writers. This will also be a place to examine, try out and tweak writing in various genres. Beginning with introductions of self and writing about ourselves as writers, then moving into thematic topics and genre studies, the notebook will house 'quick writes,' 'free writes,' mimetic responses, lists, personal narrative snippets leading to longer compositions later. Students will be able to look back and map their progress through the process of learning how to write in various genres, for various purposes and audiences. In the end, this tool should serve the students as a space for safe, high-interest, personal narrative writing ventures and become something students do not want to throw away in June.

Modeling, Mentors & Demystifying Author's Techniques

Much of what I do in the classroom is conscious modeling. I show how to be respectful when others speak, how to relax when practicing writing, how to parse out words with which I am unfamiliar when reading aloud, reading strategies to increase comprehension & enjoyment. In order to display ways we use language to understand, learn and know, I read and write daily with my students; this is not an activity only *for* students.

This sounds simple, but I find my students respond hungrily to this. It makes me wonder if they have had the chance to learn through observation and example enough. This strategy also helps create the atmosphere I want: a safe place where learning is allowed, including trying new things, practicing and where the classroom community shares often play the role of teacher & student. It is important to provide examples and mentor texts of writing activities before the student is asked to try their hand. Therefore, when my students write, I write. When we study memoir, we will read numerous portraits and imitate their style, skill and manner *before* write our own. When we study poetry for techniques, we will all play with trying it first, in order to better understand the poet's purpose.

Exit Strategies: Exit Tickets, Read Alouds

As a way of tracking and assessing student learning and effectiveness of instruction, through various methods I will ask students to respond to a question or show what they know on a regular--if not daily-- basis. It is important to set an expectation for participation, effort and individual accountability and to provide the teacher with in-the-moment snapshots of how individuals and the class are doing. By keeping the stakes low, the content interesting and the exit strategies varied, students will come to know they will write, think, speak often and as a way of showing what they know.

An Exit Ticket, so called because it is the “pass” to leave the room at the end of class, can be used to get students to share what stands out, what was most important, what was learned that day in our lessons. These tickets can also be used to show students not only understand a concept, but can also apply their new knowledge. I may say, “Now that we’ve looked at and written some of our own metaphors, select one from your Writer’s Notebook and put it on an exit ticket.” The ‘ticket’ can be created ahead of time (colored paper, made available to students, shaped like or designed to look like a ticket) or, as I do, a simple post-it note, index card or piece of loose leaf. These are easy to collect at the door. Students can exit by voting on an issue, brainstorming lists, or a writing ‘what I learned today’ ...all which can be useful segues into the next day’s lessons.

Read Alouds, asking students to share their writing out loud with the teacher, partner or whole class, are used from week one to create a culture of safety and support for writing practice. Initially, I ask students to closely imitate other writers and genres, and then read aloud from these pieces to an audience. This is an excellent way to ask students to assess a piece of writing, by listening to it out loud. Ultimately, students will begin to write their own pieces in multiple genres, and often students will not only become aware of themselves as writers and speakers, but many find their own voice or style.

Digital Word-smithing

Throughout the year, I plan to incorporate technology into our writing lessons. This is not only relevant to students today, it is necessary. By using digital applications, in and out of the classroom, students will be able to see the numerous ways our ‘text rich’ culture reflects the multitude of genres in which students can participate and practice their own skills. At school we will use Photo Story and Movie Maker programs to illustrate our stories and bring them to life. Students can literally go from writing a story, to illustrating it with either still or motion pictures, to crafting a video presentation for sharing or posting.

From user-friendly sites like Wordle and Glogster, I plan to encourage students to write off the page and on the screen. I may ask students to find clips from YouTube on Greek heroes and mythological figures, snag some of their own text from their Writer’s Notebook on creation stories and mix them with clip art and quotes to create an interactive electronic poster via Glogster. (*see Resource section*)

Visual essays are another strategy to get reluctant writers to first organize and present their ideas, whether expository or persuasive, around a central idea. In preparation for teaching, I created a visual essay on heroes, “We Need a Hero.” Featuring music, quotes and over sixty

images of heroes & their quests, this power point with perks (created with Mac's iMovie program) prompts discussion of what it means to be a hero. The title, music and text suggest different ways we currently view heroes, from rock to sports stars, from famous to everyday folks. And students readily see and make the connections between main ideas, details and illustrations, as well as theme and thesis statements.

Classroom Activities

While this curriculum unit spans the entire school year and could easily be tailored for all four years of high school English, the following Classroom Activities will focus on one aspect, *The Hero's Journey*. Remember, this plan, as well as the entire unit, provides many opportunities for integrating multiple skills and academic goals. The following are ways a teacher may choose to weave emphasis in any of the language arts disciplines: writing, reading, speaking and of course, *thinking*.

written expression- focused options include a focus on personal narrative, elements of story, techniques-audience-&/or-purpose via genre writing,

literature - options exist for genre or multi-genre study, or for elements found in nonfiction/fiction, print/electronic, or presented thematically for focus on audience and purpose, literary craft

speaking - focused options exist for writer's workshops where sharing original classroom text can be central or imbedded in the previous disciplines, multi-media storytelling skills.

While including lesson plans for this ten month unit would not be feasible here, the Sampling of Plans and annotated bibliography, which follows, should give interested teachers plenty of places to dig in, recreate or reinterpret this unit for their own classroom needs.

SAMPLING OF PLANS: "*The Hero's Journey*"

Below, is a sampling of lessons I taught to introduce a theme we will continue to examine for much of the year. It is a central concept for understanding the basics of story structure and elements, and it is an archetypal notion which is essential for foundations in critical thinking and further, richer literature analyses. Additionally, it is an idea which becomes my vehicle for my ninth grade students to connect with our studies in the disciplines of language arts, while holding their interest and investment.

"The Hero's Journey," specifically the hero archetype, orients students toward examination of male and female protagonists as actors in the framework of story, characters who are also symbolic and archetypal, universal and ubiquitous. It is a topic which engages this age group and strikes at their developmental and burgeoning interest in who and what they want to be like. It is also a precursor to our reading and study of Homer's *Odyssey*, a standard ninth grade text. Once students explore the dimensions of the hero, the heroic quests or adventure, the stages of the journey as symbolic for the individual's journey through life, they are more than ready to tackle selected literature as something of value for their own life's journey.

Week One - Focus: Examining heroes (then & now); learning the stages of the Heroic Journey

Introduction to Hero's Journey:

Students define in writing, before, during and after the video: What is a HERO?

Additional prompts may include asking students to share a story of heroism from their own lives or someone they know; asking students what conditions need to be present for a hero to emerge & become a hero. (Note: I always make sure we are thinking of male and female heroes and find it is more effective to prod consideration of past and present, famous and not so famous people.)

THE HERO MURAL

Based on an anticipatory prompt asking students to describe their personal hero and tell a story about why they are their hero, students will contribute to a classroom mural (wall collage) on heroes. By bringing in a headshot (8x10 clear copy or print I can copy for them) of their own personal hero and using their narrative, students will then take the 'best of the best' of their text and create a written tribute to embellish their image. Words on, across, around the hero's head create a multi-media result! These are scored with a rubric and added to the mural. You can easily stretch this into an informal or formal presentation by students to the class.

2. Present a visual essay (see Strategies, above) like "We Need a Hero."

You can easily use images you Google or find sites like this one to get you started:

HYPERLINK "<http://tatsbox.com/hero/index.html>" <http://tatsbox.com/hero/index.html>

Another option is to use parts of longer videos, such as the 1987 documentary "Joseph Campbell: The Hero's Journey." (see *annotated bibliography*)

3. Students will brainstorm in Writer's Notebooks and then share ideas on types of heroes, qualities of a hero, past and present heroes.
4. Using a chart of the Hero's Journey (I use a simplified version true to Campbell's), teach the stages of the heroic journey. (You can easily search online for examples of these to suit your needs.)
 - a.) I will often begin by pointing out to students that hero's adventures can be quests (for treasure, truth or to save someone or some thing, even the planet), odysseys (long journeys to accomplish a goal, even if it is to go home), or a series of challenges.
 - b.) I do this on the board and encourage note taking, as well as pondering. One way to do the latter is to ask students to apply to popular movies & books (eg. *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, etc) to the typical heroic path we just learned. Be sure to sure with the class.
 - c.) Have students work alone, in pairs or in small groups to 'map' the heroic journey of a familiar epic (see above). Use for assessment.
5. Demonstrate how chart can be viewed symbolically for a human life. Show how the Threshold stage can relate to being the new kid at school or on the block. Suggest students think back to a time when they were in a new situation or place and had to rely on others to guide them, as in the Mentors segment of the chart.
 - a.) I often use myself as an example, and plot appropriate highlights from my life (eg. my battle with breast cancer) on the chart. You could just as easily use a familiar hero story or piece you select which follows the heroic journey storyline.
 - b.) Have students apply chart to our own lives. This can also be as an assessment, or at least

as a pre-writing exercise in their Writer's Notebooks.

Resources

Teachers List

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. 3rd ed. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1949. Print. Bolligen. Considered a major work of the twentieth century, this defining text is one of Joseph Campbell's best. Known for his work in comparative mythology, Campbell's life long study of world religions, anthropology and stories converges in this accessible text. In it, you will find an outline for the universal motifs of the hero/ine, creation myths, and most importantly, the Hero's Journey of "adventure and transformation." A compelling, anecdotal and reliable read, this is the notion that would not stop until I linked it to my teaching of storytelling, myths, folktales and especially the role(s) of the hero -- then and now.

Dean, Deborah. *Genre Theory: Teaching, Writing and Being*. Urbana, IL: National Council of

Teachers of English, 2008. Print. Dean translates genre theory for the classroom teacher, providing ample samplings of activities for teachers to borrow. I found her ability to lay out the rationale and pedagogy for multi-genre endeavors, as well as broadening options for lesson planning beyond the multi-genre project or research paper useful.

Fletcher, Ralph R. *Breathing In, Breathing Out*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. Print. A classic text for teachers of writing and writers themselves. Fletcher introduces and steps through various practical tools and activities for keeping writing fresh, authentic and vivid. I used Fletcher exhaustively for developing my own version of the Writer's Notebook in my classroom.

Gilligan, Stephen. *The Hero's Journey: A Voyage of Self Discovery*. Bethel, CT: Crown House LLC, 2009. Print. I used this book for 'deep research' on the psychological aspects of the Hero's Journey. Because the stages of the journey are universal and have their roots

in ancient myths and symbols, this Ericksonian perspective on Campbell's work was useful for me to pull from for creating lessons that relate to each student. Based on a self-help seminar/workshop, there are adaptable exercises in this book which follows the stages of the journey.

Johnson, Cheryl, and Jayne Moneysmith. *Multiple Genres, Multiple Voices: Teaching Composition in Argument & Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2005. Print. This book serves as a good go-to for ideas about how to teach multiple genres for various purposes and audiences. While the book is heavily focused on Multivoiced Argument (MVA), which centers around reinvigorating the traditional research process and paper, the practical ideas and steps in this book will help the teacher who is concerned with expanding their writing instruction to address the techniques, ideas and benefits of a multi-voiced approach.

Kirby, Dan, Dawn Latta Kirby, and Tom Liner. *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing*. 3rd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004. Print. The Kirby's offer up sound, exciting and easy-to-implement writing strategies for young writers. This go-to reference for everything from daily writing prompts ('Freewrites' and 'Quickies') to writing specific tasks (countless memory joggers for memoir writing) is encouraging and accessible, containing numerous writing suggestions for the classroom teacher. What a cookbook is to the cook, this book is to writing teachers and writers alike.

Romano, Tom. *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2000. Print. Romano's work is both inspiring and practical for the classroom teacher. Romano's application of genre theory compels students to "not just tell, but show" through a blending of narrative and traditional writing techniques. This book is a valuable resource for lesson planning and ideas for student writing assignments, large and small. It is also a useful for teaching genre, subgenre and writing strategies.

Romano, Tom. *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. Print. "This book will inspire you to teach, to write and to question, and it may move you to tell your own stories of teaching, learning and literacy." So says the endorsement on the back cover of Romano's part memoir, part teaching resource, part gospel (my words). This book will give you pause to examine your methods and the encouragement to jump in and celebrate the act of storytelling with your writing students.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. 3rd ed. Studio City, CA: Micahel Wiese Productions, 2007. Print. For use in lesson planning, this book contains chapters on archetypes and the stages of the Hero's Journey, with plenty of writing questions/prompts. But there's more! The index for cross referencing is ideal for topic searches for writing assignments and there's even a section for film study.

Classroom Use List

Glogster – Poster Yourself | Text, Images, Music and Video. Web. 27 Nov. 2010. < HYPERLINK "http://www.glogster.com/" <http://www.glogster.com/>>.

This free website takes a little preparation time, as the teacher will want to open his/her own educator's account. Once you have done this, you may want to play a little to get a sense of all Glogster can offer. Be prepared for your students to surpass you, however, once you get them online! They will quickly catch on to the multi-media (videos, music, scrolling text and thematic art can be easily imbedded and applied), click and drag creations they can manifest. Like the old-fashioned poster project, only better!

Homer. *The Odyssey*.

Joseph Campbell - The Hero's Journey. Dir. David Kennard. Perf. Joseph Campbell, George Lucas. Acorn Media, 1987. DVD.

I first used this video in a film class because of its extensive clips and tie-in to George Lucas' "Star Wars." Lucas consciously created his epic film series based on Campbell's work on the Heroic Journey. This interesting documentary (in whole or part) may or may not suit your classroom needs, but as a resource for planning, it is quite helpful. You can order it online or search it for streaming.

Wordle - Beautiful Word Clouds. Web. 27 Nov. 2010. < HYPERLINK "<http://wordle.net/>" <http://wordle.net/>>.

Limitless options and variations on font, color and form make Wordle fun! Students will swiftly learn how to use this easy site, where words are entered into a text box and then magically arranged into visually appealing word clusters. You have to try it to see what I mean, but you will begin to understand how limitless the options are for the classroom, once you do!

Appendix

Implementing District Standards

In the state of North Carolina, for English I, four out of six overarching Competency Goals have this in common: Reading and writing which exposes and introduces students to effective communication techniques. Featured heavily in the broader competencies are the genre study and written expression, personal connection, response and reflection. Using my unit, Writing For Your Life, all of these skills can be taught.

On the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSOS) website, English I is introduced as such:

Students in English I explore the ways that audience, purpose, and context shape oral communication, written communication, and media and technology. While emphasis is placed on communicating for purposes of personal expression, students also engage in meaningful communication for expressive, expository, argumentative, and literary purposes. In English I, students will:

Express reflections and reactions to literature and to personal experience.

Explain meaning, describe processes, and answer research questions.

Evaluate communication and critique texts.

Make and support an informed opinion.

Participate in conversations about and written analysis of literary genres, elements, and traditions.

Use knowledge of language and standard grammatical conventions.

Furthermore, NCSOS also includes an emphasis on “strands” which include oral, written language and other media/technology.

North Carolina Standard Course of Study: English I (adopted 2004)

Competency Goal 1

The learner will express reflections and reactions to print and non-print text and personal experiences.

Competency Goal 2

The learner will explain meaning, describe processes, and answer research questions to inform an audience.

Competency Goal 3

The learner will examine argumentation and develop informed opinions.

Competency Goal 4 The learner will create and use standards to critique communication.

Competency Goal 5

The learner will demonstrate understanding of various literary genres, concepts, elements, and terms.

Competency Goal 6

The learner will apply conventions of grammar and language usage.

For the complete document, go to:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/languagearts/scos/2004/27english1>