

## Me as a Character, My Life as a Story

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### Rationale

In his *Power and Portfolios*, former English teacher Jim Mahoney discusses an article, “Untold Stories: Culture As Activity” in which author Bruce Pirie seeks to prove that our culture is not only composed of both told and untold stories but that its sustenance depends on the telling of these stories and their overall creation. Mahoney echoes Pirie’s notion that we, as teachers, tend to mistreat “the body of literature that often serves as the English curriculum.”<sup>1</sup> He states that “our job [as teachers] is more that transferring this culture [enlivened by the existence of stories] to our students.”<sup>2</sup> Mahoney quotes Pirie in saying, “If we see this body of literature as a kind of fixed and permanent form of art ‘to be carved up like food and served to our acolytes,’ we have missed the point,” for “the body of literature is unfinished and it is there to be acted upon by new readers who create new stories as a result of the old ones.”<sup>3</sup> Mahoney reiterates Pirie’s warning that, “once our stories become icons of greatness to be stored and admired as museum pieces, once we believe there are no more stories to tell, then our culture becomes dusty and dies.”<sup>4</sup>

In my overall experience as both a learner and an instructor of English or Language Arts, studying literature is mainly about understanding, analyzing, and maybe admiring the elements of each existing piece, such as setting, theme, or characterization. As pupils ourselves, we are trained to analyze the information that is simply given to us by the author. We are taught, for instance, to dissect the characters in the story to discover character traits, development, and motivation. And, once we’ve done that, we move on to another piece of literature and do it all over again, occasionally comparing the different pieces to one another. I find that we are rarely encouraged (or we as the instructors rarely do the encouraging) however, to compare these elements of story to our own lives or to our own stories. We seem to skip the step where once we have analyzed one or multiple pieces of literature, we allow ourselves or our students to really think introspectively, even though, as humans, we are not only “relentlessly capable of reflecting,”<sup>5</sup> but it is a vital part of our design and condition. Vikki Pollard, in her “Ethics and Reflective Practice: Continuing the Conversation,” claims that each individual has specific experiences that crave “genuine self-examination,” and such reflection facilitates a “conversation between the self and that which is not yet known; a conversation that forces modifications to actions” as long as individuals have the “courage to face themselves.”<sup>6</sup> We do not spend an adequate amount of time thinking about how a piece of literature or its elements could relate to our own lives and their details. We spend so much time figuring out what the protagonist’s main characteristics are or what the theme of the piece is, but we neglect to connect this analysis to our own characteristics or the

topics or themes that surface in our lives or throughout our thoughts. I think that experienced and engaged analysts of both print and non-print texts think, for instance, about questions, such as: Would I have done the same thing that the main character did if I were in his situation? Or, they try to recount a time when they either mimicked or reversed the actions of said character; however, as instructors, we often neglect to “make room” in our curriculum for really expanding on such thinking. I think that I do encourage my students to briefly reflect and connect personally with a studied text, but I know that I do not give them adequate time or “space” to develop these reflections, conceptualize their meanings, and develop a potential story of their own. Being able to make such developments in certain college courses is what made me love the subject of English; however, with restraints such as standardized testing and time, in general, I tend to stray away from permitting my students to think reflectively, personally, and even philosophically as inspired by a specific text. And, I know that I do not arrange time for them to organize these thoughts and connections into a story of their own. I know that this involvement, this idea of students connecting their own stories to those surrounding them is important, but I don’t really design lesson plans or activities around exploring such ideas that encourage students to think “bigger” or more abstractly.

Padgett Powell’s *The Interrogative Mood: A Novel?* consists solely of a series of seemingly unrelated and random questions that he poses to the reader. For instance, the following is a series of questions featured on page one of his “novel”: “Does a nameless horse make you more nervous or less nervous than a named horse? In your view, do children smell good? If before you now, would you eat animal crackers? Could you lie down and take a rest on a sidewalk?”<sup>7</sup> When I initially read this book for my seminar, “Exploring Big Questions,” I thought the questions utterly ridiculous due to the nature of some of them and the disconnection between one question and the next. However, upon discussing this with the other teachers and leaders in my seminar, the idea arose that while it could be a “novel imposter,” possessing few, if any, attributes of a novel, it could also be a brilliant revolution of what a novel could (and should) inspire in a reader: It challenges the reader to, in answering the stream of questions, be the character, the protagonist, interacting with different settings, encountering multiple conflicts, and craving a resolution. When thought of this way, these questions suddenly do not seem as ridiculous, disconnected, and random, at all. In fact, such a series seems to be not only an accurate depiction of how the human mind tends to work but how we as humans crave to make sense of the world around us and tell a story of our own.

Since reading Padgett Powell’s novel and being introduced to the concept of exploring big questions, I’ve tried to pay attention to what really gets my students’ attention, what really inspires their energy as they read and interact with different texts. When we read *They Cage the Animals at Night*, Jennings Michael Burch’s memoir about his journey through multiple orphanages and foster homes, I’ll occasionally stop the class discussion of the text and ask them questions, such as “Is it ever okay to steal?” or “What does it mean to be a sibling?” Or, before we read William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, I’ll

ask them, “Do you have the right to take the law into your own hands if the law doesn’t ‘succeed’?” Discussion just erupts amongst my students with these kinds of questions. And, it wasn’t until I started participating in this seminar or understanding the higher purpose, maybe, of Padgett Powell’s novel, that I understood why such freedom to explore these overarching topics and ideas tends to be so interesting for students. These questions take their analysis of a piece of literature to another level. These questions make them understand the characters and their situations in a completely different context, one in which they are invited to insert themselves and their stories for comparative purposes. Such questions inspire the students not to just receive the information the author gives them but to supply it themselves, developing their own character and identity that can exist in a newly developed plot, conflict, and resolution. They can then identify with these literary elements that we stress because they are doing so in a way that makes such elements more personal and a little “bigger.” They can create their own stories to be added to the body of literature that we so often think is complete without their contribution.

I think that the exploration of questions, “big” ones in particular, inspires such stories to develop because they provide us not only with a much-needed glimpse into the workings of the world around us, but how we perceive and interpret this world around us. For instance, if the question, “Is change a good thing?” is posed, the answer I develop reflects not only the changes that could have taken place in the world surrounding me but my feelings towards or opinions of the changes that took place. Such an exploration is the foundation of our personal philosophies about life, hinting at the essence of our character. It is a “moment-to-moment monitoring of the nature of our selfhood,” and such a monitoring “involves gaining meta-awareness of the various connections we make to diverse dimensions of the socio physical world around us. It involves isolating and letting go of an egocentrism that blinds us to the virtual and relational nature of our selfhood.”<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, we neglect to realize how facets of our life, identity, or even personal circumstances, such as “race, class, gender, sexual, religious, geographical place affiliations exert powerful influences”<sup>9</sup> on how we see ourselves and our relation to the world. This habit of exploring or “monitoring” invites us to think about what we think about and how our thinking can be inspired by the influences around us.

However, I think that the exploration is only a stepping stone. In his *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, Donald Miller proposes that, in all of us, there exists a character waiting to be revealed. He confesses, “I feel written. My skin feels written, and my desires feel written.”<sup>10</sup> He claims that our lives are living, breathing stories, complete with literary elements such as theme, target audience, and internal conflict. He further discusses that because of this, not only are we the characters in our own stories, possessing specific traits and motivations and capable of complete transformation, but also, that we are authors, empowered to edit and prepare our narratives for publication. Miller sees one’s life as a “blank page,”<sup>11</sup> one on which a story and dynamic character can be exposed. I think that this authorship is the most important part, the point where

we take this exploration, interpret it, and publish it for others to see. It is the publishing that really takes the character and develops it. When I think, for instance, about the characters that resonate with me, they are those characters, like Scout Finch, that come alive because their identity is artfully written and purposefully published.

In his “The Self As Narrator,” J. David Velleman seeks to prove the existence of a “self-narrator,” one who writes his or her life as he or she lives it; he proposes that one could exist as a “living novel” where simultaneously one’s life shapes one’s story and one’s story shapes one’s life simply because there exists a constant “correspondence between the two.”<sup>12</sup> He explores the idea of the self as “claiming not only the status of ‘Witness,’ who is the subject of experience, but also that of ‘Central Meaner,’ ‘central controller,’ or ‘Highest Authority,’” and it is because of this establishment of control over oneself that one could seek to narrate and control the publishing of his or her own life by developing his or her own autobiography.<sup>13</sup> He further proposes that, “we tell many small, disconnected stories about ourselves -- short episodes that do not get incorporated into our life-stories. The process of self-narration shapes our day-to-day lives in units as small as the eating of a meal, the answering of a phone, or even the scratching of an itch.”<sup>14</sup> And, although, these pieces could be unified to create one story, they rarely are.

In her book, *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg suggests that “we all have a dream of telling our stories-of realizing what we think, feel, and see before we die. Writing is a path to meet ourselves and become intimate.”<sup>15</sup> She states that “we are important and our lives are important, magnificent really, and their details are worthy to be recorded.”<sup>16</sup> According to Goldberg, we have a responsibility to write, for writing isn’t just the recording of loose details, but the chronicling of a “history.”<sup>17</sup> Goldberg proposes that writing gives our thoughts an actual voice, and she encourages writers everywhere to, “like grating a carrot, give the paper the colorful coleslaw of your consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> She states that when we allow our writing to make such a revelation, we are seeing the world “when we are free from prejudice and can see the underlying principles.”<sup>19</sup> Goldberg compares writing to a religious experience, for “you are exposing your life, not how your ego would like to see you represented, but how you are as a human being.”<sup>20</sup> Engaging in such a practice creates a stronghold between your thoughts and your expressions, “burning through the fog in your mind”<sup>21</sup> and connecting with your true identity. She states that writing provides us with the unique opportunity to breathe life into the emotions and opinions that are constantly circulating in our minds. Goldberg solidifies her ultimate reasoning for writing towards the end of her book:

I write because there are stories that people have forgotten to tell, because I am a woman trying to stand up in my life. I write because to form a word with your lips and tongue or think a thing and then dare to write it down so you can never take it back is the most powerful thing I know. I am trying to come alive, to find the distances in my own recesses and bring them forward and give them color and form.<sup>22</sup>

According to Natalie Goldberg, this exposition is not only powerful but vital. We all have a story to tell, and we are doing our culture a disservice if we don't tell it, publish it, and inspire readers everywhere to do the same thing, to add to the body of literature and preserve the life of our culture.

### **Background**

I currently teach English and Honors English 1 at one of the highest-performing schools in my district. Most of my students come from wealthy families, are college-bound, and thrive on academic achievement. Most of them produce excellent work and perform well on assignments, such as standardized tests. However, I have noticed that many of them hesitate or don't know where to start when I ask them to do something out of the ordinary or "beyond" the parameters of the curriculum. For instance, they can tell me the rules of comma usage, but they feel stuck if I ask them, "Is one rule more important than another?" Or, they can highlight every change that the protagonist goes through in a novel, but they feel trapped if I ask them to "dig deeper" and decide "If a change goes unnoticed, does it still exist?" Sometimes, it's like they need my "permission" to answer questions, such as "Have you ever run away from a responsibility?" or "If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?" Encouraging them to simply think more conceptually or philosophically is different for most of them. And, then getting them to use their own experiences and opinions to develop such thoughts tends to challenge them. When asked to write and publish the reasoning behind their opinions, they get stuck. For instance, I recently had my students write a response to the following question: "What is required to survive?" prior to reading the short story "The Most Dangerous Game" and memoir *They Cage the Animals at Night*. Most of my students instantly just listed items such as water, food, shelter, and money, and then stared at their papers, not knowing "what else to write." They neglect to think about the many interpretations of the word "survive," or they neglect to recount moments in their lives that demanded survival and how such moments could inspire the development of a reasonable answer. They also have difficulty understanding that what they write can and should be an accurate depiction of the activity in their minds and the formulation of their identity and character.

### **Objectives**

My ultimate goal for this unit is for my students to explore a thick concept: that they are characters and authors themselves who both drive and create stories. I want them to see their writings as both a collection of mini-stories and one large story. I want them to understand that within the composition of this writing collection, there exists "opportunity to compose a life...clarifying their lives and publishing this for themselves" and others.<sup>23</sup> In her book *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott, highlights the "thrill of seeing oneself in print."<sup>24</sup> She confirms that "it provides some sort of primal verification: you are in print; therefore you exist."<sup>25</sup> She states that there is a freedom in existing "outside yourself" and "peering out" from "inside your tiny cave."<sup>26</sup> I want my students to recognize this freedom and validation. I want them to conceptualize the idea that their own personal philosophies, particularly on potentially argumentative issues, and the discovery and pursuit of these philosophies create identity and "write" their own story or

stories. Anne Lamott describes writers, in general, as “little gods or sorcerers” free to create a world and a story to exist within it.<sup>27</sup> I want them to see that this discovery of their legitimate authorship births a “sketch” of their character and this pursuit facilitates self-characterization and personal plot development. In his *Time for Meaning*, English teacher Randy Bomer describes that, for him as a writer, this discovery and pursuit helped him to realize that “[his] identity is not the same as someone else’s, and thus [he learned] that [he is] a particular reader or writer” with unique stories to tell and opinions to express.<sup>28</sup>

I envision this unit continuing throughout the course of an entire semester and circling around the essence of the human condition, in general, and the creation, discovery, and publication of the self. I want the nature of each piece of writing to echo this topic as it is the underlying motif in most of the literature studied in ninth-grade English. At the end of this unit, I want my students to be able to both identify themselves as a character and their life as a story. I want them to see that “we invent ourselves...we really are the characters whom we invent.”<sup>29</sup> I want them to understand their own motivations and “network of values and convictions that provides a structure to their life and a definition of their character.”<sup>30</sup> I want them to see that “we need to reflect on our own positions, our own understanding of what we are saying, our own sources of authority.”<sup>31</sup> I want them to understand that “we are reflecting on concepts and procedures and beliefs that we normally just use. We are looking at the scaffolding of our thought, and doing conceptual engineering.”<sup>32</sup> I want them to express and publish themselves through the stories they tell. They should be able to compare and contrast their personal philosophies both with those of their peers and the authors of the many works of literature that surround them.

I think that the whole process could be liberating for them. If they can realize that they have the power to author their thoughts and their lives, they will also discover that they are capable of adjusting or transforming the way they think, act, and live. Donald Miller, upon “editing” his own life claims, “If the point of life is the same as the point of a story, the point of life is character transformation.”<sup>33</sup> And, furthermore, the possibility is there for “a person could plan a story for his life and live it intentionally.”<sup>34</sup> Embracing this possibility, especially for a high school freshman, could be quite powerful. They should also be able to dissect a work of literature, be it a novel, magazine article, or a commercial, to determine the “big question” that motivated its development and ask themselves, “How would I publish my philosophy on this particular topic?” They should also be able to develop and pose their own “big questions,” challenging others to not only explore heavy topics, such as sacrifice and time, but through this discovery, to understand who they are as a person and how they would characterize themselves as an author. I want them to understand that their authorship and composition of story not only contributes to the body of literature worthy of being studied but also prolongs the life of our culture.

I will use different strategies and activities to help my students accomplish this. Each strategy and each activity gets them “one step closer” to “publishing themselves” as I previously discussed.

### **Strategies**

### Pre-Reading

Pre-reading consists of activities, such as Anticipation Guides, that prepare the students for different concepts or topics that will surface in an upcoming piece of text. This strategy encourages students to be more active readers or viewers, so when they actually encounter the text, they will be more prepared and have the freedom to make more personal connections as I previously discussed. Being able to make such connections will inspire their own writing in response to what they read.

### Literature Circles

This strategy helps students to have an organized small-group discussion about a select work of literature. Each student has a specific role that they play in the discussion, fueling their analysis of certain parts of the texts. In sharing their analysis with their group, they are able to explore others' opinions and viewpoints of the text and the topics that surface in the text. Such an exploration gives them a chance to compare and contrast their understanding of a text with that of their peers.

### Socratic Seminars

This strategy is rooted in Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than for us as their teachers to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. Since "human experience is marked by uncertainties,"<sup>35</sup> Socratic Seminar doesn't ignore these uncertainties; instead, it uses them to encourage students to wrestle with different ideas and use "their interrelationship, their connections to the social sphere"<sup>36</sup> to discuss possible interpretations of a specific subject. It consists of an active and analytical discussion between the students and possibly regulated by a student leader. This could be a discussion about any part of the curriculum as long as it is focused on something that doesn't have a "right answer." In his *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School*, Matt Copeland compares the critical thinking required for Socratic Seminars to the process of writing. He states that "both are processes that challenge us to revise and improve our ideas for the benefit of our own understanding and the understanding of others."<sup>37</sup> Copeland explains that "at the end of the day, our writing, our thinking, and our lives are merely 'rough drafts,' works in progress" for us to tweak using any of the influences around us.<sup>38</sup>

"Big questions," such as those previously mentioned, are perfect for structuring a Socratic Seminar. Through their discussion, students could seek to collaboratively answer a question or set of questions posed by the teacher or discuss a "hot topic" (that inspires the development of a big question) that surfaces in the selected content to be discussed.

If they're comfortable and prepared, the students could even formulate their own questions ahead of time to pose to their classmates and inspire the discussion. The outcome of the discussions could fuel the content in the student writing to follow.

### Processing Loops

It is important not only for students to process the material that we teach but also that we witness and can continuously informally assess their processing of the material. Processing Loops are designed for this to happen. They encourage students to "turn and talk" to their peers sporadically as a lesson progresses. Following this "turning and

talking,” groups of students can report out, to the rest of class, clarifications of the material or connections to prior learning. When we are analyzing big topics and questions, this verbalization allows students not only to voice their opinions and arguments but to compare and contrast them with those of their neighbors. Their opinions may change depending on the nature of their conversation, and such a change could be chronicled in their writing.

#### Peer-Sharing and Writing Groups

Peer-sharing and participating in writing groups allow students to receive feedback on their writing throughout the different stages of the writing process. Writer Anne Lamott highlights that “the person [reading and commenting on your draft] may not have an answer to what is missing or annoying about the piece, but writing is so often about making mistakes and feeling lost.”<sup>39</sup> Navigating through this chaotic terrain with another person or group of people could steer the writer in a purposeful direction, for “there are probably a number of ways to tell your story right, and someone else may be able to tell you whether or not you’ve found one of these ways.”<sup>40</sup> Students can either select their partner for peer sharing or their members for their writing group, or the teacher can arrange partnerships and groups. If the students are composing a narrative essay, for instance, I allow my students to select the people who will be reading their drafts due to the personal nature of the writing. However, if it’s an argumentative essay, on the other hand, I may arrange the partnerships or groups depending on student skill level and competence. Peer shares and writing groups can take place during the invention, drafting, and/or revision stage of writing. Students should provide feedback to one another about the content, organization, and mechanics of their piece. Students can then use this feedback to revise their existing piece and improve it for the next or final draft.

#### Workshopping

Once we’ve composed a full draft of a piece, often we long to share it, for we are “social animals.”<sup>41</sup> After all, we “wouldn’t spend a month on an oil painting and then mummify it. [We] would hang it up where people could see it.”<sup>42</sup> Workshopping allows not only for this sharing and displaying to take place, but it creates this environment where the author continues to receive feedback from multiple people on a draft that is close to being finalized. To workshop a piece of writing, the student author makes a copy of his or her draft for each of the students in the class. (The student author can choose to include or omit his or her name from the draft.) The students read and annotate the “to-be-workshopped” draft (prior to the day it is to be workshopped), noting any feedback they have for the writer. Workshops are full-class discussions of the piece of writing where students exchange the feedback they noted on their copy of the student draft. The author is present for the discussion and can choose to either reveal his or her identity or keep it anonymous. This process is designed so that the student author can receive an abundance of feedback and opinions on his or her writing and apply them accordingly. This feedback is exceptionally helpful considering that the participants in the workshop know the parameters of the prompt and rubric as they are using the same prompt and rubric to compose their own piece.

#### Activities



### Writing Compilation (“Me As a Character, My Life As a Story”)

My unit is anchored by a writing compilation where the students compose a collection of autobiographical and personal philosophical writings. The writing compilation consists of 20 autobiographical writing prompts and 70 philosophical writing prompts. Students receive this compilation as a packet at the beginning of the semester and respond to one of the questions from the packet every day for a warm-up. It is designed so that the students can simply have “a place to live like a writer.”<sup>43</sup> The autobiographical prompts are prompts to just get them comfortable with the idea of writing as the semester begins, for many students fear writing or, at least, don’t have the desire to write.

(Autobiographical writing prompts can be found in most texts about writing.) The more topical or philosophical writing prompts are aligned with the literature being read at that time, encouraging students to explore their personal philosophies on heavier issues and topics to surface in the literature that is part of our curriculum. The compilation is organized so that students spend a week of class time discussing what I call a “hot topic” or “the big ideas around which explorations of content-specific topics are woven.”<sup>44</sup>

Some of the topics they will explore are responsibility, survival, justice, prejudice, sacrifice, and time, for “structuring curriculum around ‘big ideas’ and broad concepts provides multiple entry points for students...[inviting] each student to participate irrespective of individual styles, temperaments, and dispositions.”<sup>45</sup> For instance, as students are reading Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they spend one week of class time focusing on the topic of justice and answering the following questions: Are all people equal? Are all people the same? How did things become uneven? What created the gap between rich and poor, and why do some people have an easy life while others struggle? Why do kids in a clique pretend to be superior? How do cliques operate, and what makes membership seem desirable? Why do some kids have good health, fun, and opportunities whereas others suffer? What are some examples of unfair situations that do not affect many kids right now but could show up later in life? What is oppression? Where is it seen? What is power? Why do some people really want it? What would be on your list of children’s rights?<sup>46</sup>

We’ll explore a series (like the one above) of interrelated questions on a specific topic to energize our reading and analysis of different texts. And, we’ll focus on the characters or narrator in a story or play, the author of a piece of nonfiction, or the author or speaker in a particular poem and examine this person’s apparent philosophy on the highlighted topic or “big idea.” Ultimately, we’ll compare and contrast our answers and analysis to understand ourselves as characters and potential authors. The questions and their responses will serve as “springboards” for other activities, such as Socratic Seminars and the Narrative Essay.

### Anticipation Guide

An anticipation guide is used as a pre-reading strategy for each novel or longer work of literature. Each guide consists of statements with which the students must agree, strongly agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The statements are centered on potentially

controversial issues that will surface in the upcoming reading. For instance, prior to reading William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, students decide their "stance" on statements, such as "Parents should have a say in who their child marries or dates" or "Fights get more complicated when more people get involved." Students write their reasoning for their "stance" on each issue to compare and contrast with the perspectives of their classmates. It is interesting to play Four Corners with these Anticipation Guides, instructing students to move around to designated parts of the classroom to debate about these issues. It is also very profound to have the students return to these statements post-reading of a text to see if their opinions have changed after having read the specific piece.

#### Narrative Essay

Natalie Goldberg claims that "our senses by themselves are dumb. They take in experience, but they need the richness of sifting for a while through our consciousness."<sup>47</sup> Goldberg refers to this process as "composting," where we dig through our collected experience looking for "fertile soil"<sup>48</sup> that births the development of a solid story, one that adequately reflects what has happened to us. When students compose a narrative essay, they purposefully begin this process of sifting and composting, zeroing in on a moment that can address a certain prompt. For this unit, students will compose a narrative essay where they recount and reflect on a moment in their lives that was "life-changing." Students should focus on one specific moment as opposed to a series of moments, an event, or a certain period of time so that the reader can really experience the moment with the author, and the author can remain focused on how, exactly, it changed him or her. The students should be able to use both their autobiographical mini-writings and personal philosophical writings from their writing compilation to inspire their composition of this narrative essay. Through this writing, they should be consciously developing themselves as characters in these recreated moments and simultaneously publishing their perceptions as an author.

#### Graphic Novel

Literacy extends beyond the understanding of print text. Having students interact with visual literature, such as art, comic strips, and graphic novels encourages them to think analytically about the world around them, not just the texts they study in school. And, doing so encourages them to take this thinking and publish their own visual literature. To accompany their narrative essays, students will create comic strips illustrating their life-changing moments. Students can either use their own drawings to create the comic strip or create one using Toondoo.com, a website complete with multiple settings, characters (different clothing, postures, facial expressions are all available), and props to be manipulated for the creation of an original, computer-generated comic strip. Students can visualize and create themselves as characters, being part of a story worthy of being not only written but illustrated.

#### Argumentative Essay

Especially when they attend college and join the work force, students will be expected to develop a solid argument; therefore, "helping students or groups of students to clarify for themselves the nature of their own questions, to pose their questions in terms they can pursue, and to interpret the results in light of other knowledge they have generated is the

teacher's main task."<sup>49</sup> The students will compose an argumentative essay using personal experience, evidence from a read text, and observations to support their position on a debatable issue. I allow my students to choose one of two prompts, which are available on the College Board website:

*Prompt #1*

“‘Tough challenges reveal our strengths and weaknesses.’ This statement is certainly true; adversity helps us discover who we are. Hardships can often lead us to examine who we are and to question what is important in life. In fact, people who have experienced seriously adverse events frequently report that they were positively changed by their negative experiences.

Assignment: Do you think that ease does not challenge us and that we need adversity to help us discover who we are?”<sup>50</sup>

*Prompt #2*

“Some people believe that there is only one foolproof plan, perfect solution, or correct interpretation. But nothing is ever that simple. For better or worse, for every so-called final answer there is another way of seeing things. There is always a ‘however.’

Assignment: Is there always another explanation or another point of view?”<sup>51</sup>

Both of these prompting questions are similar to those featured in the “Me As a Character, My Life As a Story” Writing Compilation. The students will have practiced writing about and informally defending their opinions and personal philosophies; however, with this assignment, they will compose an organized argument justifying these existing opinions and philosophies, consciously recognizing and revealing the essence of their individual identity and character.

*Literature Circle Roles and Topics*

As students are reading through a novel, they will meet with the same group of peers on a weekly basis, discussing two to three chapters of the novel with their group members. Students will rotate undertaking the following role assignments: Discussion Leader, Character Captain, Key Quote and/or Word Finder, Summarizer, and Connector. The Character Captain, Summarizer, and Key Quote/Word Finder are pretty self-explanatory. The Discussion Leader creates open-ended questions about the text, challenging the other group members to analyze and conceptualize the discussed pieces of the text. The Connector draws parallels between the facets of the text and those of the “real world” and encourages his or her group members to do the same. The Connector will be the one to conclude the literature circle, drawing in the “hot topic” of the week (as outlined in the “Me As a Character, My Life As a Story” Writing Compilation) and challenging group members’ personal philosophies on this topic (and its corresponding questions) as they connect to the literature being discussed.

*Socratic Seminars with Focus Questions*

Due to class size, I structure my Socratic Seminars “Fishbowl Style,” where half of the students sit in an outer circle, and the other half sit in the inner circle, each student having a partner that sits in the opposite circle. The inner circle of students discusses the specific

text, and the outer circle takes notes on the discussion of the inner circle. Each Socratic Seminar is grounded by two “focus questions,” which are the more “big picture” ideas expressed in the text being discussed. Usually, these questions stem from the topical questions featured in the Writing Compilation and build on the themes of the text being discussed. Prior to the Socratic Seminar, the students meet briefly with their partners to decide who is going to sit in the inner circle for each question. Half of the Socratic Seminar is spent on the first focus question, and then, the students switch spots to discuss the second focus question. However, if a student sitting in the outer circle has what I call a “burning comment” to share, he or she can “tag in,” tapping his or her partner on the shoulder signaling for them to switch spots. Once this person says his or her “burning comment,” the two switch back and resume their assigned roles. Socratic Seminars challenge the students to not only compare their ideas with those presented in the text but with those of their peers.

#### Online Discussion Boards

Online discussion boards can be conducted at any point in the class and can be implemented through a number of sites, as long as they are academically focused and protected. I use a site called Schoology, which closely mimics the set-up of Facebook; however, it is an academic, not a social site. There is an access code for every created class, and I manage all content and interaction on the class site. Establishing an online discussion board for students is a great way for them to use 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to discuss the material and further their understanding. It also tends to encourage even the introverted students to actively participate in a class discussion and publish their opinions on topics covered in class. For instance, after reading *Romeo and Juliet*, I created a discussion board for the students to debate about the following question: “How do we know that the external world actually exists?” They posted their answers on this question and commented on each other’s posts. Then, they referenced a movie, TV show, or song in which someone experienced a seemingly distorted view of reality. We, then, used the content of the discussion board as a means of comparison when we answered questions of reality addressed in Shakespeare’s play.

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Notes

- 1 Mahoney, Jim. *Power and Portfolios*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002, 126.
- 2 Ibid., 126.
- 3 Ibid., 126.
- 4 Ibid., 126.
- 5 Blackburn, Simon. *Think*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 4.
- 6 Pollard, Vikki . "Ethics and Reflective Practice: Continuing the Conversation." *Reflective Practice* 9, no. 4 (2008): 399-407, 400.
- 7 Powell, Padgett. *The Interrogative Mood: A Novel?*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009, 1.
- 8 Kincheloe, Joe. *Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004, 134.
- 9 Ibid., 129.
- 10 Miller, Donald . *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009, 86.
- 11 Ibid., 93.
- 12 Velleman, J. David. "The Self as Narrator." *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 10.
- 13 Ibid., 6.
- 14 Ibid., 22-23.
- 15 Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*. 1986. Reprint, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2005, xii.
- 16 Ibid., 55.
- 17 Ibid., 57.
- 18 Ibid., 11.
- 19 Ibid., 45.
- 20 Ibid., 47.
- 21 Ibid., 112.
- 22 Ibid., 148.
- 23 Mahoney, Jim. *Power and Portfolios*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002, 14.
- 24 Lamott, Anne . *Bird by Bird*. 1994. Reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1995, xiv.
- 25 Ibid., xiv.
- 26 Ibid., xiv.
- 27 Ibid., xxvii.
- 28 Bomer, Randy . *Time for Meaning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995, 22.
- 29 Velleman, J. David. "The Self as Narrator." In *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 3.

- 30 Olson, Eric T., "Personal Identity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/identity-personal/>>.
- 31 Blackburn, Simon. *Think*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 4.
- 32 Ibid., 4.
- 33 Miller, Donald . *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009, 68.
- 34 Ibid., 68.
- 35 Kincheloe, Joe. *Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004, 29.
- 36 Ibid., 129.
- 37 Copeland, Matt . *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005, 12.
- 38 Ibid., 12.
- 39 Lamott, Anne . *Bird by Bird*. 1994. Reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1995, 163.
- 40 Ibid., 163.
- 41 Ibid., 151.
- 42 Ibid., 152.
- 43 Mahoney, Jim. *Power and Portfolios*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002, 59.
- 44 Brooks, Jacqueline Grennon, and Martin G. Brooks. *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993, 48.
- 45 Ibid., 58.
- 46 McCarty, Marietta . *Little Big Minds*. New York: Penguin Group, 2006.
- 47 Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*. 1986. Reprint, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2005, 18.
- 48 Ibid., 19.
- 49 Brooks, Jacqueline Grennon, and Martin G. Brooks. *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993, 30.
- 50 "College Board," CollegeBoard, [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) (September 28, 2011).
- 51 Ibid.

### **Reading for Teachers**

Lamott, Anne . *Bird by Bird*. 1994. Reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

In this text, Anne Lamott offers suggestions, activities, and advice as if she were teaching a writing class. Her text is divided into four sections: Writing, The Writing Frame of Mind, Help Along the Way, Publication-And Other Reasons to Write, and The Last Class. Within these sections, she makes suggesting about "writing issues," such as selecting someone to read a draft and finding voice in writing.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*. 1986. Reprint, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2005.

This text walks the reader through the practice and process of writing and making it an active part of his or her life. Goldberg provides the reader with concepts, such as using conversation habits and topics as fuel for writing and engaging in a writing partnership or writing marathon.

Mahoney, Jim. *Power and Portfolios*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002.

Former English teacher Jim Mahoney guides teachers in how to use writing portfolios to drive instruction and continuously workshop student writing. He discusses specifics, such as the contents of a writing portfolio and how to compose a literary letter.

Copeland, Matt . *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005.

This text outlines the specifics for conducting and utilizing Socratic Seminars in the classroom. Copeland highlights the benefits of Socratic Seminars, the preparation for Socratic Seminars, the establishment of the “inner” and “outer” circles, the activity and assessment of Socratic Circles, and how to align this strategy with curriculum.

Bomer, Randy . *Time for Meaning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995.

Bomer uses his own teaching experience to share ideas in how to make all of the pieces of the English curriculum come together through writing. He discusses topics, such as writer’s notebooks, responding to literature by writing literature, and reading and writing memoirs.

Kincheloe, Joe. *Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004.

This text encourages teachers to get on the students’ level, teach them where they are, and move with (not against) the evolutionary nature of the instructional world. Within the text, there are methods and justifications for designing teaching around the needs of students.

Brooks, Jacqueline Grennon, and Martin G. Brooks. *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993.

This text encourages teachers to develop instruction that inspires student inquiry, especially of big issues and topics to heighten student engagement.

## **Student Reading List**

### Full-length Texts

*They Cage the Animals at Night*, Jennings Michael Burch

This is an autobiographical piece in which author Jennings Michael Burch recounts his desperate childhood attempt to find his place in the world and someone to consistently love and support him as he is bounced around multiple orphanages and foster homes.

This text inspires discussion of themes and “big questions” associated with the topics of responsibility, compassion, change, and survival.

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee

Narrator Scout Finch discovers the harsh realities of the “adult world” when her father attempts to defend a black man in the south in the 1930’s. This novel really lends itself to facilitating discussions of “hot topics,” such as prejudice, justice, and courage.

*Bronx Masquerade*, Nikki Grimes

Upon studying the Harlem Renaissance and the artwork produced during this time period, a group of teenagers is motivated to not only compose but share their own poetry, revealing integral pieces of their identities. This piece of fiction inspires the discussion and exploration of the following topics: fear, freedom, and friendship.

*The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare

This is the tragic tale of two forbidden lovers sacrificing their lives to destroy the barriers of a deeply-rooted family feud. In reading this play, the topics of time, death, reality, and sacrifice surface and beg discussion.

#### Sample Shorter Texts

“I Have a Dream,” Martin Luther King Jr.

“The Most Dangerous Game,” Richard Connell

“The Cask of Amontillado,” Edgar Allan Poe

“The Black Cat,” Edgar Allan Poe

“Caged Bird,” Maya Angelou

“A Christmas Memory,” Truman Capote

“The Seven Ages of Man,” William Shakespeare

“The Road Not Taken,” Robert Frost

“August Heat,” W.F. Harvey

“The Gift of the Magi,” O. Henry

“The Raven,” Edgar Allan Poe

#### Classroom Materials

Copy of each text, full-length and shorter pieces

All pieces of text will be used for analysis in comparison to student-generated writing.

Copy of “Me As a Character, My Life As a Story” question/prompt packet

Featured questions/prompts will be used on a daily basis, as a warm-up, for students to begin writing about and discussing thematic questions to surface in texts.

Copy of Anticipation Guide for each full-length text



These are used as a pre-reading strategy, so students can explore multiple viewpoints on controversial issues to surface in texts.

Copy of Narrative Essay rubric and exemplar

A student or teacher sample of a narrative essay should be used to help students understand the implementation of the rubric.

Copy of writing process instructions and exemplars

Students should be given instructions on and samples of each step in the writing process from brainstorming to final drafting. Instructions and samples can be found in different instructional texts on the writing process.

Copy of Argumentative Essay rubric and exemplar

A student or teacher sample of an argumentative essay should be used to help students understand the implementation of the rubric.

Copy of role sheet for Literature Circles

Each role has a specific handout, so students can cater their analysis to their specific job. Each handout outlines the requirements for the corresponding role. Students can also begin generating these themselves once they fully understand and have regularly fulfilled the requirements.

Copy of rubric for Literature Circles and Socratic Seminar

A similar rubric can be used for both, showing students that they will be assessed on their verbal participation, written preparation, listening skills, knowledge of text, and written reflection post-discussion.

Copy of Socratic Seminar handout for each full-length text

These handouts feature the focus questions for the seminar and a space for both notes to be taken during the discussion and a reflection to be written after the discussion.

Typically, the focus questions are: “Why did the author compose this text? Who is his/her intended audience? What are the themes or messages behind this text?” And, then, the reflection calls students to summarize the discussion and connect the message(s) of the text to another piece of literature, such as a painting or song.

Copy of Graphic Novel rubric and exemplar

A student or teacher sample of the comic strip (to accompany the narrative essay) should be given to students so that they can understand the implementation of the rubric.

Pens/pencils

Writing utensils used for all writing, feedback, and annotation.

Paper

Paper used for all writing and feedback.

Highlighters

Highlighters used for annotating a text and work of peers.

### **Me As a Character, My Life As a Story**

Writing is going to be part of our everyday routine in class. Why? The everyday writing that we compose will be centered around our own experiences and personal philosophies. Through these compositions, each of us will be able to see "episodes" of our own life or story unfold and pieces of our identity or character be revealed.

**Overall Directions:** Write a thoughtful response to each of the following questions or prompts. **Each** response should...

- be kept in the writing section of your notebook
- be in order according to questions/prompts and your table of contents
- be numbered and titled according to question/prompt on top line
- be legible
- show evidence of revisions and editing (as we implement grammatical conventions)

We will spend a week discussing each of the following topics in the following order. Address one question/prompt each day of class. Each response should be **at least**  $\frac{1}{2}$  page in length.

#### **Responsibility**

- 1) What is a responsibility? Where does it come from?
- 2) Where does a child's responsibility end and an adult's begin?
- 3) How is it possible to avoid responsibility and be a happy person? Can you be a happy person surrounded by irresponsible people? How? Where (ex: in a hospital, umpiring a game) is it necessary for people to talk about the meaning of responsibility?
- 4) How is responsibility an opportunity? How is it an invitation?
- 5) What are your responsibilities? Have you ever run away from a specific responsibility? Why?

#### **Compassion and Love**

- 1) What are some examples of compassionate acts? What actions may seem at first to be compassionate but turn out to have selfish motives behind them?

- 2) How does service benefit the giver? Is it possible to be content if others suffer?
- 3) How can love be gentle yet strong?
- 4) What can love accomplish? How can it be used to solve difficulties?
- 5) When does being compassionate or loving come easily to you, and when is it harder for you to be compassionate or loving?

### **Change**

- 1) Is change a good thing? Explain your answer.
- 2) Is there anything that always stays the same? Explain your answer.
- 3) Are some changes more important than others? Explain your answer.
- 4) What changes go unnoticed?
- 5) What is the one thing you'd most like to change about the world?

### **Survival**

- 1) What does a person need to survive?
- 2) What could hinder a person's survival?
- 3) What is the opposite of survival?
- 4) What is "survival of the fittest?" Does this "process" hold true?
- 5) What is something in your everyday life that "demands" a survival of some sort (ex: dealing with a younger sibling, getting through football practice, etc.)? It can be something that is obviously difficult to survive or something that needs your embellishment to show why it takes "survival skills." Explain how to survive this part of your day/life. You might want to mention which "survival tools" would be helpful.

### **Prejudice**

- 1) Are some prejudices worse than others? Are some kinds of prejudices okay?
- 2) If you have a prejudice and keep it to yourself, is it still a problem?
- 3) What is the purpose of physical borders, between states, for example? What is the reason for the borders that exist in our minds that separate people?
- 4) Is prejudice contagious, like the flu? Why or why not?
- 5) Write about an experience that made you change your point-of-view or question your own thinking.

### **Justice**

- 1) Are all people equal? Are all people the same? Can you explain your reasoning? How did things become uneven? What created the gap between rich and poor, and why do some people have an easy life while others struggle?
- 2) Why do kids in a clique pretend to be superior? How do cliques operate, and what makes membership seem desirable?
- 3) Why do some kids have good health, fun, and opportunities whereas others suffer? What are some examples of unfair situations that do not affect many kids right now but could show up later in life? For example, if someone in a wheelchair can't get into a building, when would kids notice this lack of access?
- 4) What is oppression? Where is it seen? What is power? Why do some people really want it?

- 5) What would be on your list of children's rights?

### **Courage**

- 1) What is courage?
- 2) Is courage developed? If so, how?
- 3) Does a lack of action take courage? If so, how?
- 4) Does it take courage to admit weakness? Explain your answer.
- 5) Who are three people you admire? Select people who have an established reputation, and explain why you admire each person.

### **Fear**

- 1) Where does fear come from?
- 2) Are there different degrees of fear? If so, how could they be labeled or categorized?
- 3) What makes a fear legitimate?
- 4) What is the relationship between fear and security?
- 5) Make a list of all of the things you fear. They can be "big" or "small." Then, recount a time that you overcame a fear that you once had.

### **Freedom**

- 1) What is slavery? What kinds of things could someone/something be a slave to?
- 2) Where does one person's freedom stop and another person's begin?
- 3) Is the future free to be created? Explain your answer.
- 4) Is there anything scary about freedom? Explain your answer.
- 5) Imagine your life ten years from now. First describe how your future would be if all of your wishes come true (the "romantic" view of your future). Then, describe what your life will be like ten years from now if you continue just as you are now, no miracles or magic (the "realistic" view of your future). Now, analyze the discrepancy, discussing the differences and your feelings about the differences between the "romantic" and "realistic" view of your future. How could you find a sensible compromise between the two?

### **Friendship**

- 1) Are there any characteristics that all friendships have in common? If so, what are they? If not, explain your answer.
- 2) When do people become friends?
- 3) Can friendship withstand any kind of change? Why or why not?
- 4) What is a bully? Why do bullies bully?
- 5) Find an appropriate image or series of images that provide a visual of what friendship means to you. Provide a written explanation of your visual representation.

### **Time**

- 1) What is being done, exactly, when someone tells time?
- 2) Is it possible to count to infinity? Can something go on forever without an end? Does everything have a beginning? Explain your answers. In as few words as possible, describe "forever."

- 3) What would it be like to have a watch that is always set on "now"?
- 4) What are some things that time doesn't change?
- 5) Draw a stylized map, beginning with your birth and ending with the present. Along the way, include labels, diagrams, or visuals of what you remember as important events, places, and people in your life. Keep all items in chronological order. Then, provide a written response about what the next stop may be in your "map of life."

### Reality

- 1) How do we know that the external world truly exists?
- 2) Could the world we know and live in be a dream or a fantasy? Explain your answer.
- 3) Does free will exist, or are the elements of the world, as we know it, predetermined?
- 4) Have you ever seen insanity where you later saw creativity?
- 5) Vividly describe the craziest dream you've ever had. Or, if you have one, describe a recurring dream of yours. Do you think that this dream "says" anything about your reality? If so, what?

### Death

- 1) Why do many people refuse to talk about death?
- 2) If death could be thought of as a teacher, what would it teach?
- 3) Is there a part of someone that never dies?
- 4) What are some signs in the natural world of the back-and-forth relationship between life and death? Think...would spring be possible if everything died in winter?
- 5) What do you want people to remember about you when you die? Write your own elegy or memorial.

### Sacrifice

- 1) What is sacrifice?
- 2) Is sacrifice necessary? Explain your answer.
- 3) Could something be considered a sacrifice to one person and not another? Explain.
- 4) Could one proceed through life without making any sacrifices at all? Explain your answer.
- 5) Recount a time when you had to make a sacrifice. Looking back on it, was it worth it, or would you have done it differently?

## Anticipation Guide

### *They Cage the Animals at Night*

Read each statement carefully. Decide whether you strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, or disagree with each. In the spaces provided, state and explain your standpoint.

**1. An adult has the right to discipline a child.**

**2. It is never ok for a parent to leave his/her child.**

3. Being someone's sibling means having the same last name.
4. A child should be able to choose where he or she lives.
5. Alcoholism is hereditary.
6. If you love someone, you should say it every chance you can.
7. Food, shelter, and money are the only things you need to survive.
8. Stealing is bad.
9. Bullying means physically harming someone.
10. The people that you love the most are the people that can hurt you the most.

Anticipation Guide  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*

Directions: Read each statement carefully. Decide whether you strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, or disagree with each statement. Use the spaces provided to explain your answers in complete sentences.

1. All men are created equal.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. It's okay to be different.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Nobody is all bad or all good.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Some words are so offensive that they should never be stated or written.

5. Under our justice system, all citizens are treated fairly in our courts of law.
6. Speaking standard grammar proves that a person is smart.
7. A hero is born, not made.
8. Someone's appearance is an indicator of his/her personality and character.
9. Education is the great equalizer.
10. When the law does not succeed in punishing criminals, citizens should do so.

**Anticipation Guide**  
***Bronx Masquerade***

Decide whether you strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, or disagree with each statement. Record your stance and your reasoning in the space provided.

- 1) High school students make an effort to get to know others in their classes.
- 2) High school students feel welcome to sit with any group or table during lunch.
- 3) High school students typically make assumptions about others without ever talking to them.

- 4) It's difficult for students from different backgrounds (i.e. class, race, home-city) to be good friends.
- 5) High school students are willing to share personal details about themselves through writing or conversation.
- 6) High school students choose their friends based on their race, ethnicity, or personal background.
- 7) High school students participate in activities and clubs based on personal interests, not on status.
- 8) People are more alike than different.
- 9) Someone can be accurately judged by how they look and the way they speak.
- 10) Cliques and social groups are good for drawing people together who have common interests and backgrounds.

*Romeo and Juliet*  
Anticipation Guide

Directions: Read each statement, and decide whether you strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, or disagree with each. Write your reasoning for each in the spaces provided. Write in complete sentences.

- 1) Boyfriends or girlfriends are more important than family.
- 2) You should keep secrets from your parents.
- 3) You should know someone for at least one year before you marry him or her.
- 4) Teenagers don't know what true love really feels like.



- 5) Arranged marriages make life easier.
- 6) Parents should have a say in who their child marries or dates.
- 7) You should marry someone even if your family does not like him or her.
- 8) Love can conquer anything.
- 9) If one of your family members dislikes someone, you should dislike him or her, as well.
- 10) Love is blind.
- 11) Fights get more complicated when more people get involved.
- 12) Blood is thicker than water.
- 13) Suicide is ok as long as you're doing it for someone that you really love.
- 14) Friends are obligated to have your back when you get into a fight.

Narrative Essay  
Rubric

Think of one moment in your life that you would consider "life-changing." Write a narrative essay recounting this time in your life and reflecting on its importance. Try to concentrate on a specific moment rather than an event, period of time, or stage in your life. Your piece will be categorized as nonfiction; however, since it is a narrative, it will be more story-like. Consider the elements of both nonfiction and fiction when writing.

You will be submitting the following pieces of the **writing process** with your final copy:

Stage of Writing Process	Piece of Writing Process	Points Earned	Points Possible
Invention	Brainstorming		5
	Journal		5
	Cluster		5
Arrangement	Informal outline with thesis development		5
	Formal outline with thesis statement (typed)		5
Drafting and Revising	Introductory paragraph (original with my comments, typed)		5
	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> body paragraphs (original with revised introduction, typed)		5
	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> body paragraphs (original with revised intro. and 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> , typed)		5
	5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> body paragraphs (original with revised intro. and 1 <sup>st</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> , typed)		5
	Concluding paragraph (original with revised intro. and 1 <sup>st</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> , typed)		5
	Rough draft (all parts revised, typed)		5
	Final draft (typed)		5
<b>Total</b>			60

The **content** of your final copy will be graded using the following rubric:

Portion of Essay	Element	Points Earned	Points Possible
Introduction	Attention-grabber/hook		5
	Transition between hook and thesis		5

	Thesis statement		10
Body Paragraphs	Introduction of different part of the experience		20
	Supporting details about part of the experience		20
	Explanation of details in reference to thesis statement		30
Conclusion	Restatement of thesis		5
	Summary of key points		5
	Connection to larger theme in life		10
<b>Total</b>			<b>110</b>

The **grammar and mechanics** of your final copy will be graded using the following rubric:

Grammatical/Mechanical Element	Points Earned	Points Possible
Capitalization		5
Punctuation		5
Varied sentence structure		5
Appropriate word choice		5
Absence of wordiness, repetition, and unnecessary sentences/ideas		5
MLA format, 3-4 pages in length, 12-point font, Times New Roman		5
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>

**Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_ / 200 = \_\_\_\_\_%

All of the components, including your final copy and this rubric, are due on \_\_\_\_\_.  
This is worth a test grade.

## Argumentative Essay

You are going to compose an argumentative essay that addresses one of the two prompts below. In an argumentative essay, the author must develop his or her point-of-view on a specific topic by supporting it

with evidence. You are going to support your position with reasoning and examples from one of our **full-length texts**, your **own experience**, and **an observation** that you have made.

**Prompt #1**

“Tough challenges reveal our strengths and weaknesses.” This statement is certainly true; adversity helps us discover who we are. Hardships can often lead us to examine who we are and to question what is important in life. In fact, people who have experienced seriously adverse events frequently report that they were positively changed by their negative experiences.

**Assignment:** Do you think that ease does not challenge us and that we need adversity to help us discover who we are?

*Source: The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

**Prompt #2**

Some people believe that there is only one foolproof plan, perfect solution, or correct interpretation. But nothing is ever that simple. For better or worse, for every so-called final answer there is another way of seeing things. There is always a “however.”

**Assignment:** Is there always another explanation or another point of view?

*Source: The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

Your final copy will be graded using the “big picture” rubric that I will give you next week; however, each of the paragraphs will be graded individually, using the following rubrics: (Each rubric should be cut-out and paper-clipped to the submitted draft.)

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 Rubric for introductory paragraph      Due date: 11/22/11      Name \_\_\_\_\_

Element	Earned Points	Possible Points
Hook that grabs reader’s attention and links to thesis		5
Transition sentences that connect hook to thesis		5
Thesis statement that states writer’s position and main reason		10
Capitalization		5
Punctuation		5
Sentence structure (agreement, variety)		5
MLA format		5

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 Rubric for 1<sup>st</sup> body paragraph and revised introductory paragraph      Due date: 11/29/11

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph	Element	Earned Points	Possible Points
Introductory Paragraph	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Body Paragraph 1	Topic sentence stating reference to a text (author and title)and reasoning related to point made in thesis statement		5
	Summary of text with relevant specifics		10
	Connection to point as		10

	stated in thesis statement, explanation of relevance of mentioned elements of the text		
	Capitalization		5
	Punctuation		5
	Sentence structure (agreement, variety)		5

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 Rubric for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> body paragraph and revised introductory paragraph and body paragraph 1

Due date: 12/5/11

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph	Element	Earned Points	Possible Points
Introductory Paragraph	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Body Paragraph 1	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Body Paragraph 2	Topic sentence stating personal experience and reasoning related to point made in thesis statement		5
	Summary of experience with relevant specifics		10
	Connection to point as stated in thesis statement, explanation of relevance of mentioned details of experience		10
	Capitalization		5
	Punctuation		5
	Sentence structure (agreement, variety)		5
Body Paragraph 3	Topic sentence stating observation and reasoning related to point made in thesis statement		5
	Summary of observation with relevant specifics		10
	Connection to point as stated in thesis statement, explanation of relevance of mentioned details of observation		10
	Capitalization		5
	Punctuation		5
	Sentence structure (agreement, variety)		5

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Rubric for conclusion and revised introductory paragraph-body paragraph 3 (full rough draft to be used for workshopping)

Due Date: 12/9/11

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph	Element	Earned Points	Points Possible
Introductory Paragraph	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Body Paragraph 1	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Body Paragraph 2	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Body Paragraph 3	Full revisions, highlighted		10
Concluding Paragraph	Restatement of thesis		10
	Summary of key points		10
	Connection to larger theme in life		10
	Capitalization		5
	Punctuation		5
	Sentence structure (agreement, variety)		5