

Unearthing Student Narrative and Cultivating Voice: Breathing Life into the Expository

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Introduction

I am a victim of my own narrative—just as guilty as the rest of us. For fear of challenging the way I was “trained” to write and charting my own course as a teacher of writing, I have tried to divorce the ‘I’ from my students’ scholarly essays. I have said one too many times that there is no room for ‘you,’ ‘I,’ ‘me,’ or ‘we’ in the world of academic, scholarly writing. And the result, you ask? Boring, formulaic discourse. Students can fill in the blanks of an x, y, and z thesis and generate evidence to support the former in a valiant, or somewhat mediocre, attempt of the authorial tone; however, mastery of this generic writing has come at a high cost. Sacrificing the development of voice in student writing has produced draft after draft of cold, lifeless rhetoric. Student expository writing fails to engage the reader, and that should come as no surprise when we are asking students to put on their sterile, latex gloves and dissect a text so as to not taint it with the self. Year after year I hear the buzz words of rigor and relevance and I can’t help but get caught in the trap—the “stranglehold” rather—the “expository writing that explains and argues is more important and more mature than narrative or imaginative writing that renders experience.”ⁱ But what about relevance? If we are asking students to strip away the self, their own experiences and narrative constructs, how are we making this expository writing relevant? If I know one thing, it is that I find information most relevant when I connect it to life’s experiences, whether it be personal experiences or the world from MY perspective. Richard Rorty’s summation of postmodernism is that “truth is made, not discovered,” and if this is true, then truth is “personally and socially constructed.”ⁱⁱ If we separate the self from writing, we risk finding truth and meaning; and “life’s narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations.”ⁱⁱⁱ If we never allow students to make meaning of their lives, we cannot expect them to have a solid grasp of thinking independently or to produce authentic, purposeful products.

So where does this leave me? I want students to make meaning and then communicate that meaning in a way that engages the reader. I want my students to assert their scholarly claims and critical thinking without sacrificing voice. This unit attempts to find the place where touted expository writing intersects the less respected narrative form, so as to allow opportunities for the development of voice—the self—in ALL forms of writing.

Background

I teach at Providence High School in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School (CMS) system. We have around 2100 students at our school, and I teach about 185 of them. I teach two sections of Standard English III, and four sections of Honors English III. The English III curriculum focus is on American Literature and we are also responsible for completing the paper requirement for the CMS Graduation Project. My students come to me from a tenth grade curriculum that focuses on World Literature, but is also dictated by the state writing test. All year long, students are inundated with prompt-driven writing activities in order to ensure success on the writing test.

The test is very important for measuring growth and progress toward the school goals, and as the “pay for performance” talk increases, I am sure we will see a more intense approach taken toward guaranteeing that students do well. The test covers the definition essay and cause and effect, and while these are types of writing that do exist in the real world, the way in which success for the test is taught—or the purpose behind teaching this type of writing—is highly inauthentic. We are teaching formulaic writing that is riddled with conventions that must be followed in order to make the grade. With the ever-increasing demands of teaching, everything that must be covered and tested, making time for developing writing beyond the test seems daunting or unnecessary for some teachers. Teaching writing is difficult as is, not to mention the time and energy it takes to give timely, sustaining feedback.

I also find that my junior honors students thirst for the “right” answer, but would rather be told what it is as opposed to discovering it on their own. They cannot afford to be wrong because they have too much riding on the line: getting into a good school and pressure from themselves and parents. While there are a few “right” answers in my class, my pedagogy is predicated on inquiry and investigation. This freedom to think scares many of my students, almost to the point where it paralyzes their thinking and what they produce. I find that it is rarely the students who take initiative and advocate for themselves but rather their parents, thus further enabling a lack of independent, problem-solving type of thinking. When I ask students to free-write after reading a small excerpt, or give them a question to write freely about, I inevitably elicit the question, “what am I supposed to write about?” I blame this on many things, and education is no exception. Later I’ll discuss Freire’s “banking concept” of education, but basically it says we as educators are “projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression” and that in turn “negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry.”^{iv} Oppression, ignorance, negating education and knowledge—none of these are words I want associated with my classroom or teaching strategies. The new North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process wants to ensure that teachers are preparing students for the 21st Century in our global economy. The handbook states that we should “encourage students to ask questions, think creatively, develop and test innovative ideas” because that is what will set them apart in society—a society that demands “creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; communication and collaboration.”^v I want to encourage innovation, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and engagement using voice in scholarly writing as a vehicle. I want my students to know who they are, think independently, learn through inquiry, and then masterfully articulate what they have learned and think.

Objectives

I want my students to develop an awareness of voice in writing, and then further develop that voice through a series of activities. Students will be able to identify the voice in others’ writing as well as their own, and then use and create voice in a series of activities involving various genres. Students will read, analyze, and evaluate fiction and non-fiction for the following: the use of literary elements, rhetorical style and organization, author’s craft, and word choice. The non-fiction texts will serve as good models of scholarly writing grounded in the narrative. Students will then blend the genres of creative narrative and expository writing in a culminating contemporary essay about a major work of literature.

Rationale

Writing as a Social Act

For as much as students socialize, they have trouble making the connection that writing is a social act. Writing is a way of communicating with others, as well as making meaning of one's life in relation to the other. We all have experiences that shape our lives, and those experiences inform our writing; on the flip side, through our writing we are also shaping the experiences of others. Therefore, "the conundrum is the seeming contradiction between humans as social producers and as social products."^{vi} As writers, and teachers of writing, we must be aware of the influences acting on us, and at the same time realize our potential as an agent acting on others if we are to masterfully manipulate language: "self-discourses and practices must be scrutinized, for they are clues to the contours of the bottle—culture—that shapes the malleable self."^{vii} In order to empower students to write with purpose, the teacher must cultivate a sense of awareness of why we write the way we do in certain situations and how we select the topics we write about; it is important to help students see these influences in their own writing, the teacher's writing, and the writing of others.

Genre theory holds that "students who know that genres are more than forms, that they represent ways of being and acting in the world, are more capable of choosing resistance or compliance—and the resulting consequences—more effectively."^{viii} If I am going to ask my students to challenge the rules of writing they've grown up with, they must first understand that genres are acts that "position participants, creating social roles for them."^{ix} Understanding writing and how it functions in various social contexts is the first step in choosing whether or not to comply with readily accepted and respected conventions; it gives students the power to do the unexpected with purpose and deal with the consequences that might follow. One of the rules my students will question is the exclusion of 'I' from the realm of academic writing, laying the foundation for the self to emerge and in turn produce engaging writing that builds a relationship between the reader and writer.

In an attempt to discover voice and how the 'I' functions in writing, students will also have to realize that genres are used "consciously and unconsciously, creatively and formulaically, for social functions and individual purposes, with critical awareness and blind immersion" because they fail to recognize that their voice and style changes with the genre—the way they act in conjunction with others socially.^x Students often do not realize that they have voice in their writing, but they are convinced that their voice is not valued in the expository essay. Before they can take on the challenge of breaking convention with purpose, they need to know the various ways in which they can and do assert themselves, orally or in writing. Part of the unit will help students surface their unconscious uses of rhetoric, empowering them to manipulate language for a desired effect.

Writing as a Thinking Act

It is difficult to develop an identity as a writer if you cannot think independently. This issue confronts me daily as I watch students sit there, unable to form their own thoughts, or just plain debilitated by the freedom to think on their own. For most of them, writing and even

participating in a class discussion amounts to giving the teacher what they want to hear and getting the grade. They are afraid to take risks—to be wrong or explore new territory. That makes writing almost impossible, and developing voice...you can just forget it! In his book *Writing with Passion*, Romano states that “a maxim writing teachers have been fond of for years holds true: how can I know what I think until I see what I say?”^{xi} When I am faced with blank stares, I often have my students pause and write it out in hopes that seeing their words on paper will stimulate thinking and cause them to reflect on what they might have to say in the first place. Tom Romano goes on to talk about the illusionary “dichotomy” between analysis and synthesis in writing and finally lands on “good writing, regardless of the mode of discourse, causes writers to think. That thinking involves a productive dialectic between analysis and synthesis;” the two acts are not “mutually exclusive.”^{xii} I want my students to be operating in the higher orders of thinking, and I know that authentic writing assignments can accomplish this type of thought. Forming your own independent thoughts helps you develop a sense of self; you begin to understand where you stand in relation to the position of others and your experiences. If a student blindly accepts everything they are told or read without ever questioning, wondering, or reflecting, they cannot take ownership of their thoughts, opinions, and rationale behind what they do and say. And for most of my students, if I didn’t ask them to write something, they wouldn’t think—they would sit there in ritual compliance, waiting out the awkward silence that inevitably solicits someone else’s thoughts, namely the teacher’s. This common classroom occurrence relates to Paulo Freire’s “Banking’ concept of education.”^{xiii} Freire claims that education has adopted, or quite frankly has always lived out the myth that students are empty accounts into which we deposit knowledge. He says that we as educators have a tendency to position students as subordinate beings who know very little and need to be taught, and so by default we remove student-inquiry from the classroom and dominate in an attempt to fill. Freire says, “the more completely they [students] accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited on them.”^{xiv} If students are treated as only blank pages to which we’re acting as authors, and this is all they’ve ever known in education, why should we expect them to be practiced in the art of independent thinking? How could they have a voice when they’ve always been told what to say? Freire continues to say, “the teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication.”^{xv} If I want my students to think for themselves, to put the self in writing, I have to get them communicating, out loud and on paper. Students need to have something to say before they can craft how to say it; before they can breathe life into their writing. “Anyone who writes...knows that the act of writing leads to thinking, leads to thinking that would not have been thought unless the act of writing had been under way.”^{xvi} I want to empower my students to think independently.

Where the Two Intersect

Writing is both a social and thought-provoking process, and these two concepts should not be mutually exclusive in the academic realm. As Paulo Freire states, “education is suffering from narration sickness,” that is to say we’re not creating authentic experiences for our students to grapple with reality, but rather we are stifling voice, identity and independent thought by imposing our narratives on them.^{xvii} It’s time for the oppressed to rebel. It is time to make academic writing engaging, to reclaim the scholarly and saturate it with life; to make a place for

voice in the seemingly pretentious and detached world of expository writing. As teachers, we need to remember “that we humans do our most creative and effective work when we are driven by an intrinsic motivation: a human need to investigate, to wonder, to imagine, to share, to teach, to persuade, to learn.”^{xviii} We naturally desire to explore the questions that arise in the midst of being. If we refuse to allow space for our student’s narratives in the world of academic writing, then we encourage inauthentic, sterile rhetoric that has very little meaning in the lives our students.

Where the social and thinking aspects of writing intersect starts the development of voice: “Voice is the meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community...the struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else.”^{xix} Voice is often described as the life force or personality behind the writing. It stems from an awareness of self and leads the reader to a better understanding of tone and an appreciation of style. An awareness of the narratives acting as agents in our lives develops the sense of self—these narratives help us make meaning of our reality in an academic setting or otherwise. “We impose stories on the world in order to tame it; in order to make it manageable.”^{xx} In his book *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*, Robert Nash paraphrases a mantra for educators:

Find the I of yourself first, because this is the prerequisite for finding everything else. Then focus on the you, your storytelling students. Finally, find the point of intersection between the I and you, and this becomes the we. Because, in the end, teaching that matters is not just about me or you. It’s about us.^{xxi}

We want students to construct meaning and understanding of themselves, the world, and what we teach. We want our students to produce masterful, engaging writing. We need to understand and value the interconnectedness of writing as a social and thought-provoking act, as well as the necessity of an awareness of self and how it shapes voice in all genres of writing. “Our job as teachers is to help student writers find a voice in each piece they write.”^{xxii} In order to accomplish this task, we must know ourselves and share our voice in writing, as well as examples from great writers that we find to be particularly interesting.

For this unit, I have chosen authors that I find to be overwhelmingly engaging—texts where I can sit down and get lost in the writing. The examples I have chosen to share with my students are all nonfiction and include memoirs, speeches, vignettes, and contemporary essays. I am very passionate about these authors, and so I find it fairly easy to elicit student buy-in, at least for the reading portion of this unit. The authors I use have very witty, sardonic voices, and their literature is grounded in narrative—this isn’t your typical high school reading. As you read over the strategies and activities, I encourage you to tailor this unit to your interests and passions, and/or those of your students. Bring in works that you are absolutely mesmerized by, and have your students do the same. Figure out what works with your style and curriculum because this unit is very conceptual and can fit nicely with just about any novel and nonfiction choices. Own it.

Strategies

Daybooks

Daybooks are a type of writers' notebook used widely by The National Writing Project, and discussed by authors such as Ralph Fletcher in many books about teaching writing in the classroom at all grade levels. This is usually a composition notebook that is used by students and teachers to brainstorm ideas for writing, organize thoughts, respond to texts, respond to peers, and produce just plain old writing. This type of a writers' notebook is not usually assessed for accuracy, but rather thoughtful participation. As Ralph Fletcher says, "this notebook is your private place to write badly."^{xxiii} This notebook should allow students to explore the many facets of the writing process without fear of being judged.

Processing Loops

It is proven time and time again that students need time to process the information they just received. One quick way to do this in class is to have them "turn and talk" to a peer sitting in close proximity. You can assign students to certain partners for classroom management or learning-level purposes (differentiation), or simply let them choose. Sometimes I will have students respond in written form in the other student's daybook, other times they will read their writing aloud, and sometimes they merely talk about the text or writing. As a time management element, and to build community in the classroom, I say something like, "the person with the most siblings will go first," or "the person who has had the most pets will go first." Students enjoy this; it doesn't take long; and it adds structure and continuity to the peer discussion.

Examining Model Texts/ "Copy-Change"

As part of this unit, we will read and examine model texts—texts that demonstrate a strong and engaging use of voice, yet still have something to say that is anchored in narrative and evidence. I think an important step beyond simply examining texts, is to have students model the good, "cool" things that good writers do in their own writing. This is where the term "copy-change" comes into play. In his book *Crafting Authentic Voice*, Tom Romano mentions that "Stephen Dunning and William Stafford write about the technique of copy-change as a way for beginning writers of poetry to develop 'a poetic way' of looking at the world."^{xxiv} "Copy-change" means that students will copy the voice and style of the author, changing words and certain features to accommodate their purpose and audience for the piece of writing. We're not simply identifying the masterful metaphors of good writers, we're going beyond and creating our own modeled after the writer we're studying. Think parrots—or even parody!

SOAPSTONE

I was first introduced to SOAPSTONE during my student teaching and then again when I used SpringBoard as an eighth grade Language Arts teacher. It is a strategy used by the AP CollegBoard to help Pre-AP and AP students analyze text. You can find many variations of this acronym, but the one I would like to focus on is one that labels each letter as follows:

S-Subject

O-Occasion

A-Audience
P-Purpose
S-Speaker
T-Tone
O-Organization
N-Narrative Style
E-Evidence

After students have read a text, you have them break it down by following the SOAPSTONE model. You can come up with specific questions for each letter to further guide their thinking. This is a great way to chunk and analyze a text that packs a lot of punch. You can easily differentiate using the model by altering the questions you pair with each letter or by stopping at ‘T’ and making the rest of the four letters stay with the ‘T’ for ‘Tone.’

Mapping an Essay

A strategy that Lil Brannon introduced to our seminar and that she describes in the book *Thinking Out Loud on Paper: The Student Daybook as a Tool to Foster Learning* is called “Mapping an Essay.” Lil says, “rather than me having to explain every difficult concept in the essay, the students are able to work collaboratively to think critically about and understand the text.”^{xxv} It boils down to students symbolically representing key parts of the essay and extracting specific pieces of text to support their conclusions, interpretations, and representations. The directions for mapping an essay are listed on page 55 in the book.

Gallery Walk

One alternative to having students stand up and present their poster or group work is to have students conduct a gallery walk. After students have finished their assignment, one that involves some type of visual, you have them publish it by hanging it up around the room. After every student or group has published their work, you give students a handful of sticky notes and have them silently visit each piece of work and in a thoughtful, critical manner, comment on the work by placing a sticky note on it. Other students are able to read both the sticky note and the published work before making their own comments. It is a great way to get students out of their seats, and if you coach them on what is an appropriate, quality comment, you’ll be highly impressed with the level of “silent” discussion.

Activities

Setting the Stage

The following set of activities is meant to create an awareness of voice in student writing as well as published writing. These activities are an outlet for students to first try their hand at discovering their voice, and then give them an opportunity to use that voice with purpose because they have figured out they have something to say. Most of these activities will take anywhere from 15-45 minutes, and where I am able, I will estimate the amount of time it takes for each activity.

Voice Cards—Series of Introductions

Prepare three different colors of index cards for each student. Due to the sheer number of students I have, I opted to cut pieces of construction paper into eight rectangles with a paper cutter because it was quick and cheap. The color of the cards does not matter, but it is best to have three different colors because it draws more attention to the differences between the writing on each card. Each student gets the first color of card and is instructed to pretend they are asked to write an introduction of themselves to be published in the yearbook because they are going to be featured in one of the sections. Give students anywhere from 2-4 minutes to write, and while they are doing that, pass out the next color of card. For the second card, have them write an introduction they might read to our class, now that we're a little more comfortable with each other. What would you want us to know about you? Again, give them 2-4 minutes to write their introduction, and pass out the third card. On the second card, have students write an introduction they might publish for their profile on Facebook (or whatever the latest social network might be). Give them another 2-4 minutes to finish up their introduction, and then call time. Now, have students pass their three cards and their daybook to a neighboring peer (or you can assign), and at this point you want students to read each other's three introductions and jot down observations in their neighbor's daybook (NOT THEIR OWN). They should be noticing similarities and differences and anything that really stands out to the reader. I would allow about 5-7 minutes for the observations, then have students trade cards and books back to one another. Allow for one last reflection where the student reads their neighbor's observations, reread their own introductions, and then draw some final conclusions. I wrap up this activity with a whole class discussion of general observations either of their own writing or someone else's. I emphasize the distinction of voice in each introduction, and how we write differently for different purposes and audiences. You should see some light bulbs buzzing...

Free Write

For warm-ups—a quick, 5-10 minute activity to get class going—I will have students free write a response to the two quotes listed below in their daybook (this would take place on two separate days). Both of the quotes continue the discussion of voice and “the self” in writing. After a quick, five minute timed free write, I will have students turn and talk about their response. Then, I will discuss whole class, capitalizing on the teachable moments that inevitably come up in the student responses. These quotes are found as epigraphs to two separate chapters in the book *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing*.

Chapter 6:

You will find the pronoun “I” used in this book a great many times. When overdone, this is considered bad taste. I have overdone it. Another much-used word in this book is “you.” This is in better taste, I understand, but I suspect that I have run “you” into the ground as well. Taste be hanged... To write, a person must think for himself. Unless he does this, what he produces is nothing. You hear me? —Gene Olson, *Sweet Agony*^{xxvi}

Chapter 13:

Tell your daughter that she can learn a great deal about writing by reading and studying books about grammar and the organization of ideas, but if she wishes to write well she will have to become someone. She will have to discover her beliefs, and then speak to us from within those beliefs. If her prose doesn't come out of her belief, . . . she will only be passing along information, of which we are in no great need.—Barry Lopez, *About this Life*^{xxvii}

Voice Lessons

In this activity, students will read examples of texts and then model them through the process of copy-change. These activities should take place on three separate days, and will last anywhere from 15-25 minutes in class depending on which text they are modeling. Students will not share any of their drafts until the “Name that Voice” activity. The first piece students will read is a student example found in the book *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing* in chapter six called “Staying Alone.”^{xxviii} This piece shows a person talking to themselves with two different voices, one “that is afraid, the other reassuring.”^{xxix} Students are able to go back and forth between two voices in one piece, but both of the voices are their own—think devil and angel on your shoulders, but don't let them be cliché. Students will draft their own self-to-self piece in their daybook. The next example students will read and model is “My Name” by Sandra Cisneros. You can find this text in her book *Vintage*; it is also a vignette from her other book *The House on Mango Street*.^{xxx} Before I have students model this text, we will talk about the parts that we love and point out the vivid, creative language she uses. Then, I will allow time for students to model this text in their daybook. This will take them longer than the “Staying Alone” model, so I might allow 15-20 minutes in class, or have them start in class and then finish for homework. The last short text students will model is the “I Am What I Am” examples that either you create to share with your own students, or other examples you find in Tom Romano's book *Crafting Authentic Voice*, Chapter 20 “Imitation.”^{xxxi} Before you have students parrot the format and cadence, discuss what the author is doing in each piece. Point out the rhythm the repetition and diction create. This will be an in-class, timed writing assignment lasting about ten to fifteen minutes—it works perfectly as a warm-up.

Name That Voice

This activity came about as a request from my students, and it what such a great idea, I couldn't help but include it as a part of the unit. Students wanted to hear each other's writing, but also wanted to guess to see if they could correctly identify the author because of their “voice” in writing. This was something my students wanted to do during the introductions activity, and so I told them I would consider it and see where it might fit later in our discussion of voice, as we had already shared our introductions with a few other students in class. So, for this activity you will have students submit their favorite model piece from the “Voice Lessons:” “Staying Alone,” Cisneros, or “I Am What I Am.” You can either read the pieces aloud to the class, or you can randomly select student volunteers to read the anonymous pieces (typed with no name). Students will guess in one of two ways: if it is a larger class, students will number their paper and write down a guess for each piece, then the teacher will reveal the authors; if it is a smaller class, you can have students guess aloud after each piece, and then reveal the author.

Dress Rehearsal—Literary Analysis

It is now time to bring in the element of expository writing, and it will take the shape of a literary analysis. This will fit nicely with whatever major work you are teaching in your class, and for my class I gave them a prompt where they could either discuss Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* or Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. I do believe that students should have some element of choice in writing because it makes the process a little more authentic for them. I would either give them a choice in which text they discuss with a guided prompt, or choose the text and let them pick their writing topic. This assignment should embody the traditional expectations of a literary analysis and be a topic that students can connect with on a personal level—relatively universal. When I assess the essay, I follow a rubric that focuses on the sophisticated use of writing conventions, depth of analysis, accuracy of interpretations, organization, and appropriate use of textual evidence. You should give yourself enough time to grade these papers before you begin the last activity “Revision in Two Acts,” and enough time for your students to take this paper through the writing process. My paper requirement was three to five pages, double-spaced following MLA formatting guidelines.

“And the Oscar Goes To...”—Learning from the Greats

Barbara Kingsolver

Depending on your student's interests and what you want to point out with the essay, students can read one of the following three essays by Barbara Kingsolver: “Household Words,” “Stealing Apples,” or “In the Belly of the Beast.” The first two are from her collection of essays called *Small Wonder*^{xxxii}, and the last is from her collection *High Tide in Tucson*.^{xxxiii} After students read the essay, they will work collaboratively in groups of three or four and “Map the Essay.”^{xxxiv} Once students have completed their map, they will publish it by taping it somewhere in the room. Once all have been published, conduct a gallery walk where students comment on each other's maps and answer the critical thinking question the group has presented (the last step in “Mapping an Essay”). Afterwards, you will want to have a class discussion to tie-up any loose ends and point out some of the stylistic features, such as narrative, that Kingsolver uses to reveal her message. Be sure to point out the most engaging parts of the essay and talk about why it draws the reader to that particular part of the text.

Kurt Vonnegut

The next text students will examine for its stylistic features is Kurt Vonnegut's speech “Why My Dog is Not a Humanist.”^{xxxv} This is a speech he gave while accepting the American Humanist of the Year award in 1996. Students will examine and analyze this speech using the SOAPSTONE method. Students will look at the subject, occasion for this literary event, the audience, the purpose, speaker, tone, organization, narrative style, and provide evidence to support analysis—evidence of the various rhetorical elements.

David Sedaris

Another author students will read is David Sedaris. His writing is just such a great example of

voice in writing. Personally, I find it very engaging and relatable, and I want students to appreciate it as well. One of his personal stories is called “Us and Them” from his book *Dress your Family in Corduroy and Denim*, and it is about an experience he had as a child around Halloween. This text can be found online on the National Public Radio (NPR) website.^{xxxvi} Students will read the story as homework, and then post a response online discussing their three most favorite quotes/passages and why they chose those particular examples. To conduct online discussions in my class, I use the website Schoology. There are many sites where you can hold online classroom discussions, but this one is free to educators and extremely easy to use and set-up with your students. I highly recommend looking into this site.

Louise DeSalvo

Louise DeSalvo is another writer with a great presence in her writing, and there is one part of her memoir *Vertigo* that is very relevant to high schoolers.^{xxxvii} This memoir is hard to come by, but it is something worth sharing, even if you just read the short passage aloud to your students, just so they can get a feel for another great writer who has mastered the art of revealing self—life—in writing. In her book, the short passage can be found on pages 182-185, and it talks about a student connecting with a theme from Shakespeare because she makes a personal connection about having a sexual relationship with a guy who is not committed in a way that most people desire or expect in an intimate relationship of that nature. You will want to examine the story closely and see if it is appropriate for your students and their level of maturity.

Revision in Two Acts

At this point, you should be ready to give back the literary analysis. Students will revise this essay in two different ways. The first will be a traditional revision where they review and synthesize your feedback, producing some version of a correction. You could have students correct the whole analysis or just part of it. Students tend to make the same mistakes over and over again in their writing, so it is typically just as effective to have them correct one to three paragraphs of their essay according to the feedback you’ve given—it is obvious whether they got it or not. You can even have students highlight the sections they corrected and have them resubmit the draft you originally graded.

The second part of the revision will be very challenging for most students, but it will stretch them as writers if they will just try it and embrace the experience. Ask students to rework their literary analysis to make it sound more like the “greats” we’ve read. The analysis should sound like the student—written in their voice, not the sterile, objective academic voice. The goal should be to stay true to the essence of the original assignment—an analysis of the meaning created by a character questioning society in either *The Crucible* or *The Scarlet Letter*—but reworking the presentation of their ideas and analysis. This is very abstract for students to grasp; however, if you guide the student in the direction of first finding their own “narrative” with regard to the assignment, and then advise them to foreground their literary analysis with their own narrative, they will start to sound more like the authors we have just studied. The topic I have given them is one that everyone can relate to, and so when you are choosing your assignment/prompt, make sure it is something that is relatively universal. The original prompt I assigned asks students to identify a character that questions society in the midst of their

conformity, and then analyze how that conflict adds overall meaning to the major work. Help students realize that they conform on a daily basis: in school, at home, at work, in their organizations, with friends, on sports teams, at church, etc. Then ask them, why? Why do you conform or succumb to the expectations and appropriate decorum for each context? Do you believe in everything you do? Are your actions aligned with your beliefs and philosophies? Do you agree with those authority figures that you submit to every day? Will you continue these things when you have more opportunity for freedom and independence in your life? Why or why not? Answering these questions will act a springboard for their second revision. You would need to come up with questions that are specific to your original assignment for the literary analysis. Take this “contemporary essay” through the writing process, assess and have students share.

Annotated Bibliography

Brannon, Lil, Sally Griffin, Karen Haag, Tony Iannone, Cynthia Urbanski, and Shana Woodward. "Sustaining Daybooks." In *Thinking Out Loud on Paper The Student Daybook as a Tool to Foster Learning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008. 54-55.

This book offers discusses many ways to utilize the daybook in the English language arts classroom. It discusses the rationale, set-up, implementation of activities, and assessment of daybooks across grade levels. This is the book where you can find the directions for mapping an essay.

Connelly, F. Michael, and D. Jean Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2-14.

This article talks about the teaching-learning relationships that are shaped by the teachers' experiences and about how the narrative inquiry fits within the world of educational research. I use this article to support my rationale for the unit.

Dean, Deborah. *Genre theory: teaching, writing, and being*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 2008.

By title alone, you can tell that this book explains what genre theory is and the role it plays in the teaching of writing. Genre theory is very interesting and sometimes complicated to grasp, but I use it to back my rationale for writing this unit. This book helps the reader understand the importance of studying and defining genre as a teacher and student—people existing in relation to one another.

Fletcher, Ralph J.. *Breathing in, breathing out: keeping a writer's notebook*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.

This is a great book if you're just getting started using a writer's notebook, or if you're interested in utilizing the strategy as a part of your curriculum. I only use this book to refer to a comment he makes about daybooks, but it is worth checking out in its entirety if this strategy is one you want to use in your class.

Freire, Paulo, Ana Maria Araújo Freire, and Donaldo P. Macedo. "The Banking Concept of Education." In *The Paulo Freire reader*. New York: Continuum, 1998. 67-72.

This chapter is incredible and is aligned with my philosophy of teaching. I use this chapter to support my rationale for writing the unit, but it is more than just that to me. It discusses how education tends to oppress students by stifling independent thought and expecting little from them in terms of what they know entering the classroom. I cannot do this philosophical work justice in a short annotation.

Gallagher, Chris W., and Amy Lee. *Teaching writing that matters: tools and projects that motivate adolescent writers*. New York: Scholastic, 2008.

Here is another book that provides great strategies and techniques for teaching writing. This book is used to provide more support for my rationale.

Holland, Dorothy, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. "A Practice Theory of Self and Identity." In *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University press, 1998. 19-42.

This text is used to support my rationale for the unit. It is an extensive discussion on how self-discourses and identity are shaped by cultural and other factors that vary across cultures.

Kirby, Dan, Dawn Latta Kirby, and Tom Liner. "Different Voices, Different Speakers." In *Inside out: strategies for teaching writing*. 3rd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004. 76-77.

This is an amazing book on strategies for teaching writing—one of the best I've read in a long time. I use this book for the two free-writes and for a couple of other copy-change activities that help cultivate an awareness of voice in writing for my students.

Nash, Robert J.. *Liberating scholarly writing: the power of personal narrative*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

This book is great for tying understanding how and why we should incorporate personal narrative into scholarly writing. It is geared primarily toward secondary and post-secondary teachers and students, but fundamentally can apply to all grade levels. I use it to support my rationale.

Romano, Tom. "Truth Through Narrative." In *Writing with passion: life stories, multiple genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. 3-6.

This chapter of the book discusses the dichotomous thinking that promotes the stereotypes that narrative, creative writing is fluff, and expository writing is rigorous and more respectable, and then challenges that way of thinking.

Romano, Tom. *Crafting authentic voice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.

This book is perfect for this unit—rationale, strategies, and activities—because it focuses solely on creating voice in writing. This is one of the better resources I've found that extensively discusses the ins and outs of voice in writing, and it is highly accessible to all types of teachers of writing.

North Carolina Public Schools. "Teacher." North Carolina Public Schools.
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/profdev/training/teacher/> (accessed October 5, 2010).

This is a website where you access the NC teacher evaluation manual. This manual outlines the 21st century skills we want to impress upon our students, and these skills are aligned with the objectives of my unit.

Student Resources

Cisneros, Sandra. *Vintage Cisneros*. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.

Students should read "My Name" for one of the copy-change activities in this unit.

DeSalvo, Louise A.. *Vertigo: a memoir*. New York: Dutton, 1996.

This should only be read with students that are mature enough to handle the content. I only use the short excerpt found on pages 182-185. This is used as part of "Learning From the Greats" in my unit.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The scarlet letter*. Pleasantville, N.Y.: Reader's Digest Association, 1984.

This is a classic novel written by Romantic author Nathaniel Hawthorne about Puritan society. This book is one I have chosen for study in my course on American literature, and it is one of the choices of text students have to analyze for their literary analysis.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *High tide in Tucson: essays from now or never*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

---. *Small wonder*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002.

Great collections of essays students can read for models of contemporary essays grounded in personal narrative.

Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1959.

This is a play about the Salem Witch Trials in 1692. It is another choice for the literary analysis.

Sedaris, David. "Excerpt: 'Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim': NPR." NPR: National Public Radio: News & Analysis, World, US, Music & Arts: NPR.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4720088> (accessed November 2, 2010).

This is a great example of voice in writing. This excerpt from the memoir is about a childhood experience on Halloween. It is used with the online discussion in the unit.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "KURT VONNEGUT: Why My Dog Is Not a Humanist." KURT VONNEGUT: His life & work displayed in a site called "The Vonnegut Web". http://www.vonnegutweb.com/archives/arc_humanist.html (accessed November 2, 2010).

Another great example of voice in writing, this is a speech Vonnegut gave while accepting an award. Students will analyze this poem using SOAPSTONE.

Materials for Classroom Use

- Three sets of colored index cards for the "Introductions" activity. Each student should receive one card of each color.
- Copies of the quotes for free-writes.
- Daybooks (composition notebooks) for each student.
- Copies of the instructions for "Mapping an Essay."
- Butcher block paper and markers for each student group.
- Access to an online discussion forum for your students.
- Copies of, or access to Vonnegut speech.
- Copies of, or access to Sedaris excerpt.
- Access to Kingsolver and DeSalvo texts.
- Examples of "I Am What I Am" writings.
- Examples of "Staying Alone" activity with directions.
- Copies of major work of literature for the literary analysis.
- Access to "My Name" by Cisneros.
- Poster or handout of SOAPSTONE strategy with guiding questions.
- Rubric for assessing literary analysis.

Romano, Tom. "Truth Through Narrative." In *Writing with passion: life stories, multiple genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. 3-6.

Nash, Robert J.. "Personal Narrative Writing Matters." In *Liberating scholarly writing: the power of personal narrative*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004. 7.

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Ibid., 22.

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Ibid., 5-6.

Freire, Paulo, Ana Maria Araújo Freire, and Donald P. Macedo. "The Banking Concept of Education." In *The Paulo Freire reader*. New York: Continuum, 1998. 67-72.

Ibid., 69.

Ibid., 72.

Romano, Tom. "The Five-Paragraph You Know What." In *Crafting authentic voice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004. 64.

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^{vii} Ibid., 22.

^{viii} Dean, Deborah. "Why Study Genre Theory?." In *Genre theory: teaching, writing, and being*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 2008. 7.

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^{xi} Romano, Tom. "Truth Through Narrative." In *Writing with passion: life stories, multiple genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. 3-6.

^{xii} Ibid., 5-6.

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^{xiv} Ibid., 69.

^{xv} Ibid., 72.

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