

## Students Writing Their Future

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### Introduction

We are all writers. We write every day. The majority of this writing comes from the day-by-day, minute-by-minute, second-by-second narrative that plays in our minds; an authentic literacy that pours from our minds without missing a beat. To recognize this as an art or to value it as an actual piece of writing may be seen as egocentric or self-indulgent; however, to get a 10-year-old student to harness this internal narrative and translate it into a way to ease into the all-too-horrifying “writing block” would be genius. It is apparent to many, who teach elementary students or any group of students, that there is much trepidation and angst when it comes to the craft of writing. Just the mention of a writing assignment sends most of my fifth graders into the tailspin of, *What do you want me to write about; I don't have anything to say; I have no ideas in my head.* Of course, I am paraphrasing; however, this is not a foreign dialogue exchange between assignment-excited teacher and anxiety-ridden student.

Prior to my college years, as a learner myself, I had a tendency to freeze up when asked to perform a cold write, much like my students do now. It was not until one of my English professors translated writing to me in an entirely different light and perspective that I began to crave writing and acquire a curiosity for it. She introduced the concept of the Writers' Notebook where we could simply free write, respond to quotes she presented, write poetry, respond to illustrations or photographs, anything we wanted to enter in this notebook was up to us. I was immediately hooked on this self-indulgent, self-discovery method of writing and exploration. Some days she would give writing prompts and other days she allowed us to create our own reason for writing. According to Ralph Fletcher, “Keeping a notebook is the single best way I know to survive as a writer. It encourages you to pay attention to your world, inside and out. It serves as a container to keep together all the seeds you gather until you're ready to plant them. It gives you a quiet place to catch your breath and begin to write.” I did not realize that my professor was doing more than getting us to write; she was providing us with a venue to express ourselves, discover ourselves, feel out ideas and thoughts, gently, without ridicule or torment; she was giving us a space to uncover a confidence within. Writers, 10-year-old fifth graders, anyone and everyone, can benefit from gaining a deeper view point of

themselves and an inner confidence, an inner confidence that can face and conquer anything the world throws at us. Why not gain this strength of confidence through the process of writing?

## Objectives

The heart of my unit is not purely about getting students to put pencil to paper, but while putting that pencil to paper, they begin to construct who they are and gain a sense that their ideas and thoughts are important ones to share. I feel that each student has an identity that is shadowed in fifth grade due to the nature of what fifth grade represents. Throughout my four years of teaching fifth grade, I have truly uncovered a reality of ten year olds. While entering their sixth year of schooling these students are also entering a state of uncertainty, ambiguity, an overall limbo-state, where the feelings of self-awareness and understanding of where they belong in the world are undetermined and feel unattainable. As I reviewed my four years of teaching, I began to see that fifth graders are caught between two vastly differing states of being: the child and the adolescent. The more relatable state they begin with is as *children*, with fairytale veils over their eyes and possessing minimal responsibilities and ownership of ideas. This state is the one that the majority of my students come to me in, and it is very unsettling to see just how sheltered some of them are in regards to everyday school responsibilities. The state at which I feel they must begin to uncover and face is a push toward *adolescence*. In this state they are expected to be a representative role-model for their school and school-community, where ideas are no longer provided to them but they, themselves, are asked to create and analyze their own ideas and also, the sophisticated ideas of authors and theorists. This responsibility is a new found pressure for students to overcome, and I have found that it catches most students off-guard. Among this newfound *role-model responsibility*, children who walk into my classroom are held to a very high standard of creating, owning, and justifying all thoughts, actions, and ideas that they generate. They are no longer to simply read and respond; they are to create and respond and read, relate, and justify all thoughts. In order to uphold these standards that I create my students need to gain a strong sense of who they are and who they want to become. They need to be aware of where they have come from and where it is they are heading. To better translate this transition, I have created a unit devoted to helping students reach a level of understanding of who they are and who they can become as learners. In doing so, I am hoping that they can *own* and *justify* their ideas and feel like they know where they belong in this world of uncertainty and non-fairytale-like situations that fifth grade and upcoming grades present. In addition to discovering who they are at this point in their

life, I will also be allowing them to discover who they may be as writers. Much like what happened to me in college, I am hoping to diminish the, more than likely, negative stigma they have linked to writing. The goal is to promote students to look at writing in a different light, a light that shines with excitement and enthusiasm.

In addition to discovering who they are as individuals, my students will explore the non-fiction genres of autobiography and biography in order to experience other stories where people uncover a self-identity and capture it in the written form for an audience of readers. I am hoping this exploration will empower my students with the reality that they can create and become whoever it is they want to be. This study will result in both an autobiography and my very own coined genre, the Futurology where the students will create a discourse of what they want to be and how they will get there. Their Futurology will serve as sort of a blueprint of their future goals. While studying the biography genre, the students will be laying the foreground for creating a biography of a family member, with whom they will conduct an intimate interview. The motivation of this objective is to have the students gain a stronger sense of where and who they come from. Through this interview I am hoping that the students will experience and realize the thick thread that family and tradition weave within us and may contribute to who we may become as adults. Also, through a short study of motivational anthem songs, I am hoping to hook my students with that musical intelligence that not only Howard Gardner uncovered, but that I have actually witnessed capturing an entire class of fifth graders. I have yet to meet a fifth grade student, let alone a person in general, who lacks the musical intelligence, or the music appreciation intelligence. Teaching through song, I will create a separate venue for my students to express their self-identity creation.

#### School Background and Classroom Composition:

I teach at a Basic School, where all general education classrooms are self-contained; that is to say, teachers teach all lessons to the same group of students throughout the entire school year. Students are pulled out twice a week for various extracurricular classes which are Physical Education, Art, Media/Library Studies, and Music. These classes are taught by teachers who have a degree in that field of study. Fifty-five percent of my school's population of students receives free and reduced lunch. My school is housed in a somewhat middle class, suburban area, but as that fifty-five percentage shows, more than half of our students come from impoverished households. Aside from that, somewhat upsetting reality, my school has a highly diverse population regarding ethnicities. We are one of the most diversely ethnic schools in the surrounding areas. With this, we pride

ourselves! We are able to showcase these various cultures through musical programs, art shows, and cultural feast fairs.

The Basic School philosophy is one that approaches the craft of teaching through four priorities: The School as a Community, A Curriculum with Coherence, A Climate for Learning, and A Commitment to Character. The first priority regards the parent, student, teacher, and principal relationship as a powerful collaborative bond that when working together promotes effective learning. The second priority speaks to the unity of the content areas. Teachers find a way to thematically organize each content area and find connective threads among them to strengthen the learner's comprehension. The third priority involves the learning environment. It speaks to the idea that the student is encouraged to take ownership of their education and become self-disciplined and motivated to want to be a creativity and thoughtful learner. Students are also encouraged to explore technology as an outlet for knowledge. The final priority deals with overall character building in the learning environment. Students are expected to analyze and carry out seven core virtues: honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance, and giving. Boyer believes that with these virtues, when taught through word and deed, learners will have a strong feeling of the world around them and how to exist as an upstanding, educated citizen. Although this is an environment that I greatly value, my curriculum unit is not contingent upon the use of Boyer's philosophy. Any teacher in any school can put this curriculum unit to work.

My school also supports the idea that the teacher is better suited to get to know her students if she teaches all subjects, all year. Therefore, at my school we do not departmentalize. This provides a way to see how each learner absorbs content in various areas and paints an overall picture for the teacher so that she can tailor lessons to fit each learner, in his or her specific ways of learning. For instance, if a student is proficient in reading comprehension, but does not do well in a subject area such as Science, the teacher must figure out a way to capture this student's attention during Science. Because a majority of learning Science, during the elementary years, is through basic reading comprehension, the teacher can draw attention to a Science concept through a hands-on experiment, which would tap into the student's kinesthetic intelligence, therefore, capturing his or her attention and hopefully encouraging reinforcing the learning process of that Science concept. This identification of interests and ability level is best observed by a teacher working with this student in all content areas. However, again, a teacher who may teach one subject as opposed to all can still implement this curriculum unit into their academic year.

My self-contained class consists of thirty students (this may change throughout the year as students are added into the class and those that may move). I teach all subjects, including, Math, Science, Social Studies, and English Language Arts at the fifth grade level. I participate in The Talent Development (TD) program. The TD program is a program for children who are tested and recognized as being above grade level in the areas of Reading Comprehension and Mathematical Reasoning and Skills. These students are placed in a mainstream classroom alongside children possessing various ability levels (i.e., at or below grade level). A Talent Development Certified teacher pushes-in and pulls-out to assist with applying rigor to lessons and to be sure that the students he is tracking in the TD program are keeping up with their higher-order thinking. In the classroom, the mixture of ability levels provides a challenging job for me as a teacher because I must teach to each ability level, but I must also keep a strong and flourishing classroom environment where all students feel that they are connected and able to take risks in asking questions regarding the various content areas. One may think that a student below grade level may have some qualms about asking a question in front of those that exceed his or her ability level. This is where I step in, right at the start of the year. I begin my year with a push toward high standards and expectations for all learners sitting in my classroom; no student is held to a lesser standard than another. I create lessons that involve a steady stream of rigorous, thought-provoking, higher-order thinking skills. I find that this sparks interest in all students, especially students of lower ability levels because it gives them a passion to strive for understanding and it encourages them to discuss and take a stand for their thoughts. I expect all learners to respect the differences they each possess and exude caring attitudes that foster a comfortable and challenging learning environment.

## **Strategies**

The following section will follow a consistent flow so that you, as the reader, can grab what you need and keep moving! Each strategy will be presented in the following manner: strategy name; various theorists who support the strategy; how the strategy works; when and where the strategy will be implemented in the curriculum unit.

Writer's Notebook:

Keeping a Writer's Notebook is a way to create without the fear of your product being judged. Students will feel free when writing in this notebook. It will be entitled, "iNote" to enhance the meaning behind it, which is students keeping of track, or "noting" what

they, the “I,” thinks, all while keeping with the trendy times of, iPads, iPods, iPhones, and so on. The students will house their quick writes and writing prompts throughout the year in this notebook. The students can take the notebooks home with them and free write anything they feel like, experiences, moods, ideas; they can list things that they want to share with the class; they can capture song lyrics or cut and paste pictures in this notebook. Anything that prompts a feeling in them they may put in this notebook and then capture it with their written word. It is their place. It is their time to shine and uncover what makes them who they are! What is important to remember with this notebook is that you may not grade the contents of it and you may always ask the student before you view their iNote. It is important that the students see these “assignments” you give them to create in their notebooks as nonthreatening. This environment has to feel completely different to them; different from a Standardized Test, different from a quiz or test, different from a homework assignment that is checked over. The writer’s notebook is a place for creativity without boundaries or rules, allow your students to feel that. This is where the students will begin to break free from the standardized shackles that have been put into place prior.

### Prior Knowledge Activation

When people read any text, there is natural pull to connect to the text. This pull is the activation of prior knowledge. Proficient readers try and make sense of the text at hand by connecting it to what they already know. There are various ways to ask students to activate their prior knowledge. The use of a Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL) Chart is a popular method. Students are asked to list what they already know about the topic at hand, then what they want to know, and finally at the closing of the unit or lesson, what they have learned. This method is a thorough way to capture what students know about a topic. Another way to launch prior knowledge is simply have students share their knowledge about the topic at hand with the class. Small group discussion, whole class discussion, write and pass, are all ways students can accumulate prior knowledge. If they do not have much background with the topic, by listening to their peers, they will begin to build this prior knowledge that is so important to help them connect to the lessons. As learners, we all strive to connect to the concepts and content we are presented with. We want to bring what we know about the topic to the table to show our perspective and to add to the surrounding knowledge. When I see the spark come to students’ eyes when it is a topic they have even just a little bit of prior knowledge on, they are so motivated and ready to receive more knowledge about the topic and also to share what they know about it. Above all, students (and even adults) love to share what they know about a topic they

have had experience with; it helps to build a strong posture of confidence within the person. To see that what they have to say is validated by not only the teacher, but by their peers, creates a wonderful beam of self-confidence within the student. The activation of prior knowledge will occur throughout the entire curriculum unit: before, during, and after book reading, and before and after writing prompts are given and written about. What is important to remember about prior knowledge activation is that it should happen before any lesson you teach students. It is extremely beneficial to allow students to share their thoughts on a topic with the group or in small groups, so that there is an authentic connection to the content going on before you even begin teaching. As learners, students appreciate having a say in what they are going to learn.

#### Genre Study- Autobiography and Biographies:

Having students read and analyze various autobiographies and biographies will provide them with the style of each, how an author composes the text and their motivation behind what they are writing. The students will be creating both of these during the unit, so it is important that they study the composition of each genre. Through reading biographies, students will be able to analyze how the author crafts the writing, how they take the stories of another person and bring them together in a flowing pattern that represents the rhythm of their life. It will be important to pay attention to any author's notes in the biographies so that the students can see where this person got the inspiration to write the selection. Also, by reading various autobiographies, students will be able to analyze the craft of writing in the first person, the "I" language. The flowing nature of an autobiography will allow the students to forge the path of their life's events so far and where they are headed into their future. The creation of their Futurology will be influenced by the reading of various autobiographies, they may serve as a stepping stone for what the students want to become. The students may want to choose to read autobiographies of people who have accomplished what they want to study for their future. The blueprint process will start here.

#### Picture Walk

The picture walk strategy is used when students are previewing books and creating predictions about a book's content. The students take note of the pictures and illustrations that are provided in the book and on the covers. It serves as a rich class discussion to warm the students' brains up to the content they will be reading about.

I will be using this strategy when the students are presented with the various autobiographies and biographies that they will be reading.

### Turn and Talk

Turn and Talk strategy is very easy and very powerful. Teachers can use it during any lesson they are teaching and in any setting, given that the students are sitting next to one another. This strategy is the most useful when the students are new to one another or are beginning a new concept in a subject area. In both situations the students are more likely to have some trepidations about sharing out to the whole class, so the teacher can simply ask them to “turn and talk” to their neighbors about the topic or question. This serves as a nonthreatening environment, where they can test their answers out on a smaller group of peers and choose to share when they are done, or if they choose not to share, a peer can do it for them. I have had an enormous amount of success with this strategy throughout my years of teaching. Students really like to try their ideas out on a peer before they share them with the entire class. This is a strategy that can be used throughout the entire curriculum unit. I will use it whenever the students are asked questions or if I want them to share their ideas in small group.

### Ticket-In-The-Door and Ticket-Out-The-Door:

Both the, ticket-in-the-door and ticket-out-the-door strategies are very useful in all the subject areas. They are both forms of informal assessment of student comprehension. Regarding writing, they serve as great quick write assignments. The ticket-in-the-door strategy is used as an entrance writing assignment. It can be used to see if the students completed and understood a homework assignment from the night or as a warm up activity to get the day started. The Ticket-Out-The-Door is a strategy that asks students to provide feedback to a teacher’s question or prompt. Teachers can choose to assess these responses in the form of conventions if they wish; however, this strategy is used more to capture a student’s understanding of the topic that was just taught, or to gather a general consensus of how the class views a certain topic. I will be using this strategy throughout the curriculum unit to allow students to write snapshot ideas down and perhaps use them in their future writing projects.

During the activity where songs will be analyzed (Activity 2: Breaking apart the song lyrics of various “Motivational Anthem” Songs) I will be using single lyrics as both ticket-in-the-door and ticket-out-the-door writing prompts. The students will be asked to either analyze the lyric using their prior knowledge and understanding of the text or they



will have to continue with a sentence that links to the lyric prompt. When the final lyric prompt is given, the students will be asked to look back at all of them to see if they see a song forming. At this point, we will listen to the entire song and analyze it as a whole. The next song will continue in the same fashion.

### Graphic Organizer (T-Chart)

Using graphic organizers assists students in ordering and organizing their thoughts along with the content at hand. The use of the T-Chart allows students to compare and/or contrast ideas. The T-Chart should include two titles that describe each column. During the motivational anthem song activity, the students will be applying this strategy in order to parallel the song lyrics with the author's purpose. Organizing the information in this manner will allow students to see the immediate connection between the artist's words and the purpose behind each one.

### Questioning the Author (Author's Purpose)

In order to glean significant meaning from a text, a student must try to uncover the author's purpose, point of view, and tone behind the text. When students analyze what the author is saying and their intent for communicating it to a particular audience, the students are able to go beyond the text and gain a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the content.

Author's purpose can be broken down into four categories: to inform, to describe, to persuade, and to entertain. Once the reader has identified which of these the purpose is, they are then able to identify the genre of the text (fiction or non-fiction). After determining the author's purpose behind the text and the genre it falls into, the reader should then try to figure out the point of the view the author is writing from, i.e., biased or objective. If a selection is written from a biased point of view, it is going to read very differently from an objective point of view. Students need to determine these points of view in order to better understand where the text is headed. Tone is the last element of questioning the author. Students uncover the tone of the text by analyzing the word choice, writing style, and overall format the text is in, i.e., text features like illustrations or photographs are included or if it is poetry, how the stanza are set up will give way to aspects of author's tone.

Overall, students, when uncovering the elements of author's purpose, point of view, and tone, they are more likely to comprehend the text and moreover, relate or not relate to

the author and the content at hand. Regarding the music activity, the elements of questioning the author will be the main objective.

### **Classroom Activities**

#### Activity 1: Thought provoking photograph gallery walk

Have students purchase a disposable camera or use a camera of their own to capture photographs over a two week period. Have them follow only one rule: capture a picture of something that moves you, something that seems interesting to you. Obviously, have a discussion with your students about what is appropriate and not appropriate for this project. There will be a minimum of twenty photographs that the students will have to take for this gallery walk. For each photograph the students choose to take, they will have to create a paragraph of writing that links them to the chosen photo. The students will have to describe what provoked them to snap the shot; how they feel they connect to what is in the photo and what aspects of the photo relate to their current state of being; their life situation. When all the photos are compiled and written about the students will be asked to step away from the project for a few days. When they come back to it, the students are to look at each photograph and description in order to come up with some sort of pattern or connection that each photograph has with one another. They will be trying to uncover what it was inside of them that inspired them to take each photograph and how the justification of each somehow connects on a higher level. The objective of this activity is to exude a deeper level of understanding of oneself through the art of photography and self reflection. This is placed at the beginning of the unit because it should spark an interest and intrigue among the students and drive them to want to further understand and uncover who they are at this stage in their life.

#### Activity 2: Breaking apart the song lyrics of various “Motivational Anthem” Songs

The following five song selections are five that I personally have a connection to and believe are fantastic choices for this activity; however, the success of this activity is not contingent upon the use of these particular songs. If there are other musical selections that fit the description of a motivational anthem song, they may be used in addition to or in the place of these selected choices. To choose a motivational anthem song for this activity, one should consider the following: the song must be motivational in spirit (i.e., the sound of the song is moving) and it must have lyrics that can be analyzed and broken down to divulge a deeper meaning that the author wants to get across to their audience. The following are the five motivational anthem song titles to analyze. The order that they

are written in is the order that they should be introduced: Eye of the Tiger; Fighter; Reach; Climb Every Mountain; I Made It (Cash Money Records). The first four of the five songs will be broken down over the course of four weeks. The teacher should choose ten phrases or sentences from each song to split among a five-day school week. Two song phrases will be used per day; one as a ticket-in-the-door, the other as a ticket-out-the-door. The ticket-in-the-door should be used as a morning work writing prompt. The ticket-out-the-door should be used as an exit at the end of the day, or during a transition to another activity where the students exit the classroom during the latter part of the day. The teacher should devote a section of the white or chalk board to: Today's Writing Prompt AM and Today's Writing Prompt PM, to serve for the area where the students know where to look for their ticket in and out of the door writing activity. The students need to be guided with a simple introduction of how to respond to the prompts. They need to write whatever they feel comes to mind when they read the sentence. If this seems to be too little information for some students, ask them to write a continuing sentence that they feel would come next if this was a story. Overall, the students need to know that this will not be a graded assignment and they need to just write what comes to their mind; how they relate or do not relate to the text and/or what they feel like it represents.

When the ten song sentences are finished and the students have their responses in their iNote books, the class will gather, whole group and discuss how these sentences may relate. Before the whole class discussion, have the students share their responses in a small group. Remember, students who choose not to share, must not be punished, but they should be active listeners in the discussion. When the class comes to the whole group discussion ask the students if any of them recognize the writing prompts from something; allow students to share. At this point, share the entire song with the class. After listening to the song, the whole class will make a T-Chart where the lyrics are linked to what the students feel the author's purpose was behind each stanza of the song.

The main objective of this activity is to have the students walk away from each song with a solid grasp of the each author's purpose behind each song. The songs should be looked at as autobiographies. The teacher should prompt the students to analyze how these song lyrics may or may not relate to their lives.

For the fifth song, I Made It (Cash Money Records), I will only be using a portion of this song because it is all that is necessary and the other lyrics can be questionable for a fifth grade audience. The portion of the song is right in the beginning and continues on as

the chorus, so it is very easy to cue and use for a lesson. The students will have their iNote books open and ready to write down thoughts that come to mind while listening to the song during the second listen-through.

After the students listen to this portion of the song once, they will listen to it for a second time and take notes on what they feel as they listen to this song. After the students listen to this portion of the song twice, I will give them a print out of this portion of the lyrics and have them glue it into their iNote book and respond to the Author's Purpose of the text; i.e., "Why do you think the author wrote these words?" Students will be given about ten minutes to respond in their notebooks and then they will be asked to turn and talk with their neighbors about their responses. After about five minutes of sharing time, the students who choose to share with the whole class will be called on to share out what they thought the author's purpose was while writing this song. While the students are responding, I will be listening for the common thread theme of: this man became what it is he wanted to become his entire life. Even if he was met with distractions and people did not believe in him, he prevailed and "made it." This will be an important theme to establish for the upcoming activity, writing their Futurology. Students will be asked to think about what it is they would like to be when they are older and to write it down for homework. If they are undecided about what they want to be, then they need to write down what they want to do with the next eight years of their lives (the remaining school years they have from fifth to twelfth grade).

Activity 3: Analyze various autobiographies and report on them

Students will be presented with various autobiographies displayed on a table in the classroom: Calling the Doves/El canto de las palomas by Juan Felipe Herrera; Christmas in the Country by Cynthia Rylant; Saturdays and Teacakes by Lester Laminack; The Trip Back Home by Janet S. Wong; Two Mrs. Gibsons by Toyomi Igus; Children of the Storm: The Autobiography of Natasha Vins; My Own Two Feet: A Memoir by Beverly Cleary; Bill Peet: An Autobiography by Bill Peet; Tony Hawk: Professional Skateboarder by Tony Hawk and Sean Morime; Lemony Snicket: The Unauthorized Autobiography (A Series of Unfortunate Events) by Lemony Snicket; The Invisible Thread: An Autobiography by Yoshiko Uchida; and Otto: The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear by Tomi Ungerer. The students will be able to do a book gallery walk where they conduct picture walks and read the synopsis of each book. After all students get a chance to analyze each book, allow them to write a quick response to a selection they had a connection with or simply are interested in. After all students are finished with their

responses have them gather in groups based on the books they wrote about. Allow them to meet with all the students who also chose the same book. While in their book groups, have the students discuss what drew them to respond to that particular book, what aspects interested them and what more they wish to learn about the author.

After the students have had time to discuss their book selection with their peers they will be paired off to work on the chosen book selection. If there are students who need or want to work alone, that is doable with this activity and the following one. The pairs will begin to plan a one week schedule of reading this selection and creating a report on it. They are to attend to the point of view through which the story is told; list the various accomplishments the author has mentioned in his or her autobiography; and finally, what defines this person: their job, gender, ethnicity, family, age, accomplishments, whatever the students feel is important to this person's life. They will need to create this report in a script format so as to accomplish the next activity.

Activity 4: Present the findings of the Autobiography Report in a theatrical presentation

Once the students are finished with their reading and reporting of their autobiography selection, they will choose a format in which they will present it to the class. Each student will take on the role of the autobiographer; they will split the contents of the autobiography into the younger years of author and the elder years. Each student will be responsible for taking on the role fully, through dress, props, voice, and factual information from the book selection. The audience will take notes on each performance, noting five facts they learned of the autobiographer's life. They will also write two positives for the presenters and one area of improvement.

Activity 5: What defines a person?

After the presentations, the next writing activity will ask students what it is they feel defines or makes a person who they are to the world and to themselves. Using their previous autobiography reports to assist them, they will brainstorm what they feel defines a person. To get them into the mind-set, they will be asked to interview a family member or a trusting family friend. They will have to brainstorm what they would want to ask this person. They will be prompted to act as though they are meeting this person for the first time so as to gather as much information as they can. Some basic question prompts I will supply them with are: where they are from, location-wise; their family composition, siblings, parents, etc.; what they do, either for work, or what stage they are at in school, or if they are retired or out of school; what they did in the past, and also their aspirations

for the future. To be sure that the students gather a rich narrative from their subject, they should ask them to tell a story of when they were challenged in life; what they feared would happen; what they hoped would happen and how the situation turned out. Students should be sure to gather an overall outlook of their subject's hopes, challenges, fears, and continued aspirations of their life.

After the students gather this information, they will begin to build a short biography on this person. If need be, they can return to this person and ask further questions to help flesh out their biography. Some book selections to help them during this process are: Dare to Dream!: 25 Extraordinary Lives by Sandra McLeod Humphrey; Kids with Courage: True Stories About Young People Making a Difference by Barbara A. Lewis; It's Our World, Too!: Young People Who Are Making a Difference: How They Do It-How You Can, Too! by Phillip Hoose; Ordinary Genius: The Story of Albert Einstein by Stephanie Sammartino McPherson.

#### Activity 6: Futurology Blue Prints

Students will be asked to find a person who is currently doing what it is they would like to do when they are older. If possible, the student will meet up with this person and interview them; regarding how it is they got their position and what steps it took to get them there. For instance, if a student wanted to be a lawyer, and they found a family friend who is a lawyer, they will compose a list of questions to interview them with, paying close attention to the path this person took to get to the position they are in now. The challenges and successes they had along the way, and what it took to get through them both. This interview, along with the questions and answers will serve as the beginning to the building of the blue prints for their futurology creation.

#### Activity 7: Futurology Creation

The culminating activity for this unit will be the creation of a Futurology. I chose to create this genre due to the age group I am working with. At the age of 10, students are excited to share their accomplishments up to this point; however, because of the short amount of time and limitation of what you can do from ages 0-10, I wanted to give them a venue to plot their future aspirations, while weaving in their past accomplishments. Tying into the motivation of why I created this unit, fifth grade students need to identify a strong sense of self in order to know where they belong in their world and in the world of academics. It will be important for the students to put much effort in their research of

what defines a person, and what they think defines them right now, and what will define them in the future.

The students will implement their blue prints as plans for their future. After researching their desired occupation or goals for their future they will create their Futurology. Much like an autobiography style of writing, the students will forge their way to their future. Using all of the tools provided, the students will begin to write their future.

## **Resources**

### Teacher Resources Cited

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This selection describes and defines the Basic School Philosophy.

Buckner, Aimee E.. *Notebook know-how: strategies for the writer's notebook*. Portland, ME.: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005.

This selection walks the reader through an expanded process of implementing the Writers' Notebook into their curriculum.

Department of Public Instruction. "NC Standard Course of Study" State Board of

Education Department of Public Instruction,

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/>.

This website tracks the standards that North Carolina teachers must follow and implement throughout their teaching.

Fletcher, Ralph J.. *A writer's notebook: unlocking the writer within you*. New York: Avon Books, 1996.

This selection includes thoughts regarding the Writers' Notebooks from other authors that Ralph Fletcher collects and captures for his reader. This selection also provides various techniques of writing that help reluctant writers, simply start writing.

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

This selection is one of the best texts to read when beginning a unit of study with Writer's Notebooks. Ralph Fletcher explains, effortlessly, how to weave this technique into your teaching.

Ray, Katie Wood. *Study driven: a framework for planning units of study in the writing workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006.

This selection builds an outline for integrating writing into various areas of study.

Student Books Cited

Cleary, Beverly. *My own two feet: a memoir*. New York: Avon Books, 1996.

In this selection, author, Beverly Cleary, shares her life's events as a writer from her college years and beyond. Cleary shows children that a passion for writing can turn into a successful and enjoyable career.

Hawk, Tony, and Sean Mortimer. *Tony Hawk: professional skateboarder*. New York: Regan Books, 2002.

In this autobiography, author, Tony Hawk, shares his life's adventures and how hard work and focus got him where he wanted to be.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Calling the doves = El canto de las palomas*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1997.

This selection is an autobiography of Juan Felipe Herrera's childhood. He recounts his life as a child in the mountains of California. He dedicates his book to hard working farmers like his parents.

Hoose, Phillip M.. *It's our world, too!: young people who are making a difference : how they do it--how YOU can, too!*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

This selection contains fourteen biographical accounts of children making a difference in their work, i.e., assisting in keeping the environment healthy, creating peace and fighting for human rights. This selection also contains a guide for children to begin a quest for their own social action projects.

Humphrey, Sandra McLeod. *Dare to dream!: 25 extraordinary lives*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2005.

This selection speaks to the heroes of our history, like Helen Keller, Abraham Lincoln, and many more. It is a collection of biographies showing students how ordinary people became who it is they wanted to become by following their dreams and working hard.

Igus, Toyomi, and Daryl Wells. *Two Mrs. Gibsons*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1996.



In this autobiography, the author richly describes two of her biggest influences in her life, her African-American grandmother and her Japanese mother. Growing up in a biracial family, the author shares how the strong cultural influences helped create an everlasting bond between all of them that would last forever.

Laminack, Lester L., and Chris K. Soentpiet. *Saturdays and teacakes*. Atlanta: Peachtree, 2004.

This autobiography takes place during the 1960s and recounts the simple life a boy has with his grandmother, making sweets and doing chores. The author captures rich details of his surroundings and his feelings of love and adoration for his grandmother.

Lewis, Barbara A., and Pamela Espeland. *Kids with courage: true stories about young people making a difference*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Pub., 1992.

This selection is a collection of biographies written about young people who perform heroic acts.

McPherson, Stephanie Sammartino. *Ordinary genius: the story of Albert Einstein*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 1997.

This selection is an intriguing example of a biography that tracks one of the world's greatest geniuses. It tracks the various aspects of Einstein's life and how his mind worked.

Peet, Bill. *Bill Peet: an autobiography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

This selection recounts the author's successful life stories as an author and his work with Walt Disney.

Rylant, Cynthia, and Diane Goode. *Christmas in the country*. New York: Scholastic, 20052002.

This autobiography illustrates Rylant's childhood experiences living with her grandparents in the country and how Christmas time was an exciting and memorable season for her family.

Snicket, Lemony, Daniel Handler, Alison Donalty, and Robert Hult. *Lemony Snicket: the unauthorized autobiography*. New York: HarperTrophy, 20032002.

In this comical selection, the author answers questions regarding his popular book series. Readers are able to dive into his thoughts through reading this autobiography.

Uchida, Yoshiko. *The invisible thread: an autobiography*. New York: beech tree paperback, 1995.

The author recounts the events during America's history of Japanese containment camps and how she prevailed through these shameful events and became a successful author.

Ungerer, Tomi, and Florence Seyvos. *Otto: autobiographie d'un ours en peluche*. Paris: L'eÎ • cole des loisirs, 2006.

Through the eyes of a teddy bear, this author recounts one of history's darkest periods in time, the Holocaust. Through various events the teddy bear shows the reader the sadness of war and families that were broken apart.

Vins, Natasha. *Children of the storm: the autobiography of Natasha Vins.*. Greenville, S.C.: JourneyForth, 2002.

This autobiography illustrates how a family prevailed through religious persecution. The author defines her growth from child to young adult and all of the tough times she goes through with the support of her grandmother along the way.

Wong, Janet S., and Bo Jia. *The trip back home.* San Diego: Harcourt, 2000.

This autobiography recounts a trip the author took with her mother back to their homeland of Korea. She focuses on the gifts people give and receive and what people truly want from others, love and attention.

#### Songs Cited

Aguilera, Christina. *Fighter.* RCA Records, 2002. CD.

Estefan, Gloria. *Reach.* Epic Records, 1996. CD.

Rogers and Hammerstein. *Climb Every Mountain.* Columbia Records, 1959. CD.

Rudolf, Kevin. *I Made It (Cash Money Records).* Cash Money Records Inc., 2010. CD.

Sullivan, F., Nicholls, D., Peterik, J. *Eye of the Tiger.* Scotti Bros. Records, 1982. CD.

## Appendix

### Implementing District Standards

My unit ties into the following North Carolina Language Arts Standards:

Standard 1.03( Increase reading and writing vocabulary) will be implemented in this unit through the reading of various literature and the creating and discussing of elaborative quick writes.

**Standard 2.04** (Identify elements of fiction and nonfiction and support by referencing the text) will be implemented in this unit through reviewing and analyzing author's purpose, point of view, tone, and also through identifying genre.

**Standard 2.05** (Evaluate inferences, conclusions, and generalizations and provide evidence by referencing the text(s).) will be implemented in this unit during the reading of various autobiographies and creating the class presentation of each.

**Standard 2.06** (Analyze choice of reading materials congruent with purposes (e.g.,

reading for information, reading to extend content area learning, reading for pleasure, entertainment) will be implemented through the study of author's purpose and also through the discussion of audience in regard to the writing process.

**Standard 3.01** (Respond to fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama using interpretive, critical, and evaluative processes) will be implemented during the study of various song lyrics, interpreting autobiographies, and through class discussion.

**Standard 3.04** (Make informed judgments about television, radio, video/film productions, other electronic mediums and/or print formats.) will be implemented when analyzing song lyrics for author's purpose study and also through self reflection photography.

**Standard 3.05** (Integrate main idea and supporting details from multiple sources to expand understanding of texts.) will be implemented through the reading of various autobiographies and biographies.

**Standard 3.06** (Conduct research (with assistance) from a variety of sources for assigned or self-selected projects (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people, libraries, databases, computer networks).) will be implemented when the students conduct interviews with relatives or family friends for the creation of a biography.

Standard 4.02 (Use oral and written language) will be implemented throughout the entire unit through class discussion, small group discussion, and also during the various writing activities.

**Standard 4.05** (Use a variety of preliminary strategies to plan and organize the writing and speaking task considering purpose, audience, and timeline.) will be implemented during the autobiography presentation activity when the students are planning their theatrical presentation, paying attention to the author's life timeline.

**Standard 4.06** (Compose a draft that elaborates on major ideas and adheres to the topic by using an appropriate organizational pattern that accomplishes the purpose of the writing task and effectively communicates its content.) will be implemented when the students are creating their Futurology projects, using their blue print research and also the study of the nonfiction genre: autobiography and biography.

**Standard 4.09** (Produce work that follows the conventions of particular genres (e.g., essay, feature story, business letter).) will be implemented when the students create their autobiography presentation, biography, and Futurology projects, being sure to reference the selected material that was given as an example.

My unit also has an element that ties into the North Carolina Music Standards 6.07 (Show respect while listening to and analyzing music.). This standard will be implemented while the students are studying the various song selections and analyzing the lyrics to determine author's purpose and also to find text to self and world connections.