



Memoir Behind the Bookcase - The Wonder of Anne Frank

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Elementary English/Language Arts, grades 3-6

Keywords: Wonder, Anne Frank, memoir, picture book, children's literature, theme, character, author's purpose, inference

Teaching Standards: See [appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: This curriculum unit will serve as a creative platform to assist students in building their literacy skills related to theme, symbolism, author's purpose, and inference. In this unit, students will explore the concept of memoir writing as it applies to a variety of literary works with the focus being on the popular writings of: Wonder, Auggie & Me, and the Picture Book of Anne Frank. This unit will encourage students to use abstract thinking in order to explore the way in which prior learning and cultural influences affect their personal view and definition of what memoir writing is. Further attention will be given to the way that students read and interpret the themes of memoir writing and picture books as well as their ability to write in a memoir style. This unit includes several activities to assist students in developing a skill-set required to read, as well as, articulate themselves through memoir writing.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 24 students in Language Arts/3rd Grade

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Memoir Behind the Bookcase - The Wonder of Anne Frank

Jennifer Dalesandro

"If every person in this room made it a rule that wherever you are, whenever you can, you will try to act a little kinder than is necessary - the world really would be a better place. And if you do this, if you act just a little kinder than is necessary, someone else, somewhere, someday, may recognize in you, in every single one of you, the face of God."

— **R.J. Palacio, Wonder**

Overview

Some of my earliest childhood memories of literacy in elementary school mainly involved the use of a textbook, worksheets, and books chosen by my teacher for me to read. This clinical form of learning did not ignite the love I currently have for reading. Originally, I fell into an engaging love affair with literature when I first developed the advanced skill of reading chapter books at approximately the same age as my current students. That same passion I developed for reading and literacy as a child transferred into my adult life, as I am still an avid reader continuously enchanted by the written word. In retrospect, there were very few instances in my early learning experiences that offered an interactive engagement of the material I was being taught in the classroom. After several years as a teacher in elementary education, I have found that I can transfer my own personal love of literature into the classroom and encourage the children I teach to find a love of reading by making sure that they do not have the same negative experiences that I did.

As an elementary school teacher, my focus is to make all subject areas, especially literacy, more engaging to my students. By directly connecting the course content to their lives, I hope to ignite the spark of curiosity in my students, bestowing upon them the desire to not only research topics on their own, but to also identify a content area that would encourage them to find joy in recreational reading. I have found that one of the best ways to drive this student learning and curiosity is to use my personal love of reading to take my students on a series of literary journeys which sets the stage exposing them to cultural diversity and alternate perspectives, seeming almost...magical.

In order to reach students from all backgrounds, it is important to identify a theoretical "literary common ground." It is my belief that if one can identify a topic area that students can relate to, being able to encourage them to read material related to that topic becomes easy. As I often want to teach students about choosing kindness over being rude to one another or anyone else, I have chosen to use the book *Wonder*, based on its overall theme. For my previous students who have read this book, I have found that they have been able to make a real connection to the characters and apply it to their own lives. The activities in this unit provide students with the opportunity to do memoir emersion through journaling and free-writing, interactive read-alouds,

group memoir dissection, and picture timelines that will serve as a map to guide them in scripting their own original piece of memoir writing.

Demographics

I am a National Board Certified, third grade teacher at Bain Elementary School in the Charlotte suburb of Mint Hill, North Carolina. I have been a professional teacher for 13 years, the first of which was teaching 3-year-old preschool in West Virginia. This is my thirteenth year teaching for the urban school system known as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), which is the second largest school district in North Carolina and the nineteenth largest school district in the nation. I teach on a team of seven third grade teachers, which affords me a vast support system from a diverse group of education professionals with varying backgrounds.

The demographics of my school differ in comparison to the Title 1 school category as my school has a low percentage of students on free or reduced lunch (19.8%) and a high percentage of parent involvement. Parent volunteers are a regular part of my classroom environment. On any given day they provide support to the students and enrich their learning experiences. Bain Elementary is considered an Honor School of Excellence for high growth (93.4% of students performing at or above grade level) on standardized testing with a rich history dating back 120 years ago when John Bain founded the original Bain Academy in the Town of Mint Hill, NC. Since then, the school has grown to its current size of 1,000+ students, reflecting the corresponding growth in the town of Mint Hill. The student population consists of 73.5% white students, 11.6% African-American students, and 6.8% Hispanic students. During the 2013-2014 school year, Bain Elementary moved into a new, state of the art building. This year marks a new era in Bain's long history by providing all teachers access to new technologies such as mounted projection systems, Apple TV, and classroom iPads for students. Although Bain is fortunate to benefit from these new technologies, this unit is designed to address all demographics and benefit both students and teachers that do not have access to these resources.

The demographics of my current classroom during the completion of this unit consist of 23, 3rd Graders divided between 12 boys and 11 girls. The age range of these students is between 8 and 9 years old. Ethnicities vary slightly with 19 Caucasian, 2 African-American, and 2 Hispanic. This class is also a TD/Gifted cluster with 50% of the students in this category.

Rationale

To enhance the literacy curriculum in my classroom, I have been attending the "Exploring Memoir: From Picture Book to Digital Story" seminar instructed by Dr. Brian Kissel, a college professor of Reading and Elementary Education at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Under the guidance of Dr. Kissel, I have been exposed to a variety of outlets and examples of memoir writing to include: excerpts from longer works, watching digital stories, reading from graphic novels, and have been provided the opportunity to utilize skills driven

exercises to begin chronicling my own life in the themes of the memoir genre. Each of these different samples served a different purpose to provide me with a greater understanding and preparation to write about my own life experiences.

During our seminar our group learned to use a variety of media to assist a writer in the writing of their own memoir. Dr. Kissel led us in various exercises including: writing from photographs from the past, creating a playlist of songs from your life, and writing about memorable artifacts or objects from our life. All of these exercises provided us with a different perspective and jogged various memories from our past. All of these exercises culminated into digital memoirs, which included voice over technology as we told our stories set to pictures and music at our final class celebration. This exercise was extremely powerful for me as I learned so much about my seminar colleagues from a more personal point of view. As a classroom teacher, I can definitely see the value of my students creating digital memoirs to share their own stories with their classmates.

I chose to attend this particular seminar because I feel my third grade students would benefit greatly from the material learned not only to understand the process of memoir writing, but also provide them with a varied platform in which to better understand the concept of character development and point of view as it relates to other literary works that they may read in the future. By learning to read and write in the memoir genre, they will be able to assimilate a variety of additional themes while simultaneously building their inference skills related to the literature.

By attending the CTI Seminar "*Exploring Memoir - From Picture Book to Digital Story*", I will be able to expand my own core knowledge in the genre of memoir writing, which will provide me the necessary skills to guide my students in finding their own literary voices and an outlet in which to tell their own stories. As a 3rd grade teacher, information gained from this seminar will serve to bridge the gap in liberal arts education for students by offering an introspective approach to both history and literature while also creating a foundational basis to enhance critical thinking skills, responding to literature, encouraging abstract thought, as well as expanding on students' previously gained knowledge and enriching their understanding of how different writing genres can create significant impacts to society. Students will also be able to benefit from a curriculum unit designed from this information by offering them the ability to learn by "experiencing" the impact that one person's life, or "story," can have on an entire generation and beyond.

The ability to guide students in a more introspective analysis of memoir writing will expand comprehension skills in both the literal and inferential formats. By using picture and text materials written in this genre that most of my students are familiar with, it will provide a solid platform to bridge the gap in liberal arts education for students by offering a global perspective in: literature, history, and other social sciences. Students will also be able to benefit from a curriculum unit designed from this information by helping them to enhance critical thinking skills in responding to literature, encouraging abstract thought, as well as expanding on students'

previously gained knowledge and enriching their understanding of how different cultures view, create, and are influenced by memoir writing.

My curriculum unit entitled: "*Memoir Behind the Bookcase - The Wonder of Anne Frank*" could serve to establish a cross cultural connection in a students' educational construct that will enhance objectives of the common core standards while simultaneously providing a layered perspective as the information will be applicable to multiple subject areas. Through a varied delivery format, which will include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic methods, students will analyze and experience the genre of memoir writing in a comparative study of fictional texts written in memoir style, both *Wonder* and *Auggie & Me* by R.J. Palacio, and an actual memoir picture book, *Picture Book of Anne Frank* by David Adler.

Activities for this unit will be facilitated in two distinct phases ultimately culminating to a final assignment where students will produce their own original piece of memoir writing. Phase One will include activities that assist students in understanding the overall concept of memoir writing. This will serve as the preparatory part of the unit so students will be able to develop a definitive contextual definition of the memoir-writing genre. These activities will be layered to include several written assignments such as daily daybook writing, as well as, individual topic based written assignments that develop further understanding of the genre. Text immersion will take place in this phase in the form of short excerpts from a variety of memoir chapter and picture books as continued support in the development of concepts.

Phase Two involves classroom group reading and activities related to the specific chapter books of *Wonder* and *Auggie & Me*; supplemented by the *Picture Book of Anne Frank*. In this phase, students will be able to begin by reading fictional material written in memoir style that references historical events related to the Holocaust and then participate in activities related to furthering their knowledge of those historical events by reading a supplementary non-fictional picture book memoir of the same event. Activities in this phase will teach students to compare resources and further interpret factual accounts within memoir.

Upon completion of all activities related to the literature in the unit, students will have developed a complete understanding of the concept of memoir and will have completed an original piece of writing to show mastery of the concepts learned within the unit. A detailed discussion of the similarities and differences related to fictional and non-fictional memoir writing will be used to assess the student's abilities in observation, reading comprehension, and inference skills. Students will then be further encouraged to utilize these skills in the assimilation of future writings within the genre.

Content Background and Objectives

The memoir genre of writing can be contextually defined as a record of events within a person's life, based on the writer's own observations. Major objectives of this unit revolve around a student's ability to assimilate memoir samples in order to meet several purposes. The first of these is to learn about the characteristics of memoirs and what makes them unique as a genre. Major characteristics of memoir writing include:

- Memoir is a story of a memory that focuses on the relationship between the writer and a particular person, place, animal, or object.
- Memoir explains the significance of that relationship by revealing the writer's knowledge of and feelings about the person, place, animal, or object.
- Memoir is limited to a particular phase, time period, place, or recurring behavior.
- Memoir is told in the first person, full of details, and reflective.
- Memoir shares new insights gained in recalling the significance of the subject.

The next objective focuses on the actual writing process involved in the construction of a piece of memoir writing. This all begins with the author making a timeline of their life and events. By doing this, it helps the writer to identify pivotal moments allowing the author to identify the moments that actually mattered. These are the moments that the reader will be able to connect to and gain something from the literary experience. This concept leads to the need for the author to consider the audience that the memoir is written for. Is the memoir designed to teach a lesson, chronicle an event, or make sense of decisions that were made at a particular time? Understanding this provides the author with necessary information to organize thoughts and create a working outline. Once the author has done these things, they can begin writing the story.

It is important to understand that this genre provides a platform to learn about and from others' lives. Unlike other types of writing, memoir allows the reader to learn from the experiences, both good and bad, that another person has faced. Being autobiographical, this perspective gives readers a "real-world" perspective minus the influence of imagination required of some other genres. This can not only assist a reader in future decision making, but it can also serve as a historical and cultural reference point that can be utilized in a multitude of situations.

Finally, reading memoir gives students a reference point to connect with the text by thinking of similarities that they may have experienced in their own lives. When readers can make a connection such as this, it offers students a genre of literature that is applicable in a practical, or direct application format in which they can use to develop and improve their own writing skills. By assimilating and connecting with the memoir genre, students can find their own voice and expression of thought through scripting both short and long writings of their own in the same style.

Teaching Strategies

In my curriculum unit, students will develop a better understanding of the concept of memoir writing. Strategies of this unit will address all three of the major learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. This will allow facilitation of this unit to reach the maximum number of students possible regardless of any academic challenges that a given student may face. The objectives of this unit will focus on meeting the requirements of the common core standards for literacy and social studies as outlined in Appendix 1.

Learning in this unit will begin with students completing activities to help them understand and differentiate the memoir genre of writing compared to other literature. This may be a challenge for some as this unit is designed to service third graders and there is a core deficiency regarding the amount of previously learned knowledge they will have or are expected to have at that grade level. Much of this learning will occur with classroom discussions, read-alouds, and group work on how the theme and concept is commonly portrayed in literature.

Once students learn about and can identify the traditional themes needed for literature to fit in this genre, students will move on to activities applying that knowledge specifically related to the book *Wonder* and *The Picture Book of Anne Frank*. Even though these books are fictional texts written in a memoir style, use of these books allow students to benefit from all of the same benefits of true memoir writing. These texts provide the necessary memoir genre requirements but also use some characteristics of fictional writing to keep students engaged in the story line while addressing moral lessons and historical references.

Finally, students will write a personal memoir about a particular event in their lives and create digital memoirs using iMovie technology. The inclusion of technology in this manner helps students to figuratively bring their story to life so they can better share it with their classmates. Once the unit is complete, I will encourage students to continue to do similar activities related to the genre and comparisons of other books and media that sparks their interest.

Classroom Activities

Activity One:
Daybook Intro - Writing Into the Day

Objectives:

Students will utilize this "daybook" as a way to better organize their ideas. This will assist students in being able to visualize ideas related to the construct during their reading of the genre.

Overview:

The strategy "Daybook - Intro" is used to help students improve their writing, and sentence structure skills. Students also benefit by learning how to express themselves through writing. Donald Murray created the concept of the Daybook when he wrote the book, "*A Writer Teaches Writing*." This book is referenced in the bibliography for teachers.

Procedure:

Students will begin by decorating their Daybook covers with pictures that represent them and their life. This helps students to create a personal connection with the Daybook. Students will then do a "free write" a minimum of 2 days a week, which will be known as "writing into the day." The content of this writing is open as students can actually write about whatever they want as long as it takes up at least 1/2 of a page.

Resources and Materials:

- Hard Cover Composition Notebook
- Various pictures that represent their personality and their life

Assessment:

An informal assessment will be conducted as students will have the opportunity to share with the class both their decorating and, if they choose, what they actually write inside.

Activity Two:

Memoir Emersion - Part 1

Objectives:

Students will be introduced to the genre of memoir. By working with real memoir text, students will create a strong foundation of the genre in which to build on further activities within in the unit.

Overview:

The strategy "Memoir Emersion - Part 1" is used to help students understand the characteristics of memoir writing and how to identify whether or not a piece of writing belongs in the genre or if it belongs to another genre in literature.

Procedure:

Students will determine the characteristics of the genre memoir based on an anchor chart list provided by the teacher. The teacher will then conduct a read aloud of the first 3-4 chapters of the book, "*Marshfield Dreams*" by Ralph Fletcher. Reading of this book will be continuous throughout the unit.

Resources and Materials:

- Anchor chart list of the characteristics of the genre memoir
- A class copy of the book, "*Marshfield Dreams*" by Ralph Fletcher.

Assessment:

An informal assessment will be conducted as students will use their literacy notebooks to "stop and jot" the elements of memoir at the conclusion of each chapter.

Activity Three: Memoir Emersion - Part 2

Objectives:

Students will continue their understanding of the concept of memoir by exposure to other pieces. This will further support their foundation of the concepts and genre.

Overview:

The strategy "Memoir Emersion - Part 2" is used to help students in the assimilation of memoir writing and develop the ability to read a piece and identify the elements of memoir.

Procedure:

Students will be divided into groups of 4. Each group of 4 will be supplied with a picture book memoir to read as a group. Students will complete a T-Chart known as a "Notice and Wondering" chart. On the left side, students will articulate what they "notice" to identify it as a memoir. On the right side, students will articulate what they "wonder" or questions that they have about the memoir. Students will then share with the entire class.

Resources and Materials:

- A variety of memoir picture books to supply to each group
- Student literacy notebooks (For completion of the T-Chart)

Assessment:

An informal assessment will be conducted as students present as a formal assessment of each student's T-Chart

Activity Four: Traditional Memoir vs. Fictional Memoir

Objectives:

Students will learn the difference between real/traditional memoir and fictional memoir by reading examples of 2 fiction books written in the memoir style

Overview:

The strategy "Traditional Memoir vs. Fictional Memoir" is used to help students further develop the concept of memoir writing and help them be able to determine if literature is real memoir writing or fictional texts written in the style of memoir with the intent to elicit specific feelings in the reader. This becomes an important skill set in determining real and historical events from fictional storylines.

Procedure:

Prior to this activity, students will have been previously assigned to read, "Wonder" on their own. The teacher will conduct a read-aloud of the "Picture Book of Anne Frank." Students will complete a Venn Diagram compare and contrast the elements of memoir between these two texts.

Resources and Materials:

- Student copies of "Wonder"
- A class copy of "The Picture Book of Anne Frank"
- Student literacy notebook (For completion of the Venn Diagram)

Assessment:

A formal assessment will be conducted by evaluation of each student's Venn Diagram.

Activity Five:
Picture Timeline

Objectives:

Students will learn to identify significant people, places, and objects that represent their lives and meet elements required for construction of their own memoir.

Overview:

The strategy "Picture Timeline" is used to help students understand concepts of identifying the elements of memoir writing through visual representations (pictures) that can help them to organize their memories of particular events throughout their lives.

Procedure:

Students will collect and bring in 8-10 pictures representing their life from birth to their current age. Students will compile the pictures in chronological order on a piece of poster board creating a picture timeline of their lives.

Resources and Materials:

- Student pictures
- Poster board, scissors, glue, and markers

Assessment:

An informal assessment will be conducted by having students select one picture that they will utilize in the next activity.

Activity Six:
Original Memoir

Objectives:

Students will show/exhibit their understanding of the memoir genre of writing through direct practice by writing a memoir.

Overview:

The strategy "Original Memoir" is used to help students apply all concepts of this unit in constructing memoir writing based on the previous work they completed in the unit.

Procedure:

Students will use the picture they selected from Activity Five to craft their own original piece of memoir writing. Students will complete a draft of their memoir in their Daybook. Once completed, students will then transform their draft into a digital story utilizing the "Movie Maker" App on Chrome-book to be used as their final graded assignment.

Resources and Materials:

- Student picture selected from Activity Five
- Student Daybook
- Student Chrome-Books

Assessment:

An informal assessment will be conducted, as students will share their memoir with the class. A formal assessment will be conducted by evaluation of each student's digital story.

List of Materials for Classroom Use

Student copies of: *Wonder*, *Auggie & Me*, and *The Picture Book of Anne Frank*
These books are used as the primary texts for this unit.

Chart Paper

This is optional for teachers and students to use during the informal assessments and classroom discussions. Dry erase/white boards may be substituted.

Markers

This is optional for teachers and students to use during the informal assessments and classroom discussions. If a white board is used, dry erase markers can be substituted.

Student Literacy Journals (Daybooks)

These are notebooks that students utilize to store all written responses to books, readings, vocabulary, and other literacy based assignments. In this unit, all written responses to the activities are completed in these journals. If journals are not already used, plain notebook paper can be substituted.

Reading List for Students/Teachers

Cisneros, S. (1992). *Woman Hollering Creek: And Other Stories*. New York, NY: Vintage Contemporaries Ed Edition.

This book contains multiple short stories describing the lives of Mexican immigrants in a Chicago neighborhood and can be used to immerse students in the genre of memoir.

Gray, L. M. (1999). *My Mama Had a Dancing Heart*. New York, NY: Scholastic US.

This is a beautifully illustrated picture book following a mother and daughter throughout the seasons of their lives.

Paulson, G. (2007). *Woodson*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

This is a book of memoirs written about the author's early experiences running sled dogs in Minnesota and then Alaska. The second half of the book describes Paulsen's experiences in the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

Polacco, P. (1998). *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books.

This book is written about the sibling rivalry between the author, Patricia Polacco, and her brother who can do everything she can do better.

Woodson, J. (2016). *Brown Girl Dreaming*. New York, NY: Puffin.

This book is an account of the author's childhood, growing up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s in South Carolina and New York.

Yolen, J. (1987). *Owl Moon*. Westminister, London: Philomel.

This is a picture book written about a girl and her father's trek into the woods to see the Great Horned Owl.

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards.

This definitive cross curricular unit will seek to implement both the Common Core Standards in Literacy and the Essential Standards in Social Studies increasing the versatility of the content making it applicable to various grade levels and subjects.

This unit will address the following North Carolina Essential Standards in Social Studies:

3.H.2 Use historical thinking skills to understand the context of events, people and places.

This unit will address the following Common Core Standards in Literacy:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3

Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.9

Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g., in books from a series)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

Bibliography for Teachers

Bomer, K. (2005). *Writing a Life: Teaching Memoir to Sharpen Insight, Shape Meaning and Triumph Over Tests*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This book consists of classroom-tested strategies to assist teachers with tapping into the power of memoir with their students. Bomer describes dozens of ideas for minilessons, teacher-student conferences, writing activities, prompts, and revision strategies.

Fletcher, R. (2012). *Marshfield Dreams: When I Was a Kid*. London, England: Square Fish.

This is a book where each of the chapters are short and describes specific events outlining the author's experiences in growing up in a large family. The book provides insight into the small-world life and a simpler time.

Gibney, T. (2012, November 1). *Teaching Memoir in the Elementary School Classroom*.

Retrieved October 12, 2016, from ERIC: Institute of Educational Sciences:
www.eric.ed.gov

This article describes how one teacher implemented a memoir genre study in her sixth grade classroom using a writing workshop approach. It begins by outlining the author's philosophy and rationale for teaching writing in this manner. This is followed by a discussion of how one could organize one's classroom for a memoir genre study. Several significant mini-lessons are then described which focus on brainstorming, planning, developing effective titles, leads and conclusions, structuring a memoir texts, the use of the senses in memoir writing and strategies for revision.

Murray, D. (1985). *A Writer Teaches Writing*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin/Harcourt.

This book is a resource for introducing the concept of daybooks into the classroom. Murray's book explores the idea of teaching writing effectively by understanding how writers write.

Palacio, R. (2015). *Auggie & Me: Three Wonder Stories*. New York, NY: Knopf Books For Young Readers.

This is a chapter book sequel to the book, *Wonder*. In this book, the author allows readers to see August through the eyes of Julian, the bully; Christopher, August's oldest friend; and Charlotte, August's new friend at school.

Palacio, R. (2012). *Wonder*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

This is a children's novel written by the author after an incident where she and her three year old son were waiting in line to buy ice cream. Her son noticed a girl with facial birth defects. This situation sparked Palacio to teach society a valuable lesson. The novel is written from several different points of view all surrounding the main character,

August, and his first year attending public school after being homeschooled up to fourth grade.

State Board of Education. (2010, December 2). *North Carolina Essential Standards Third Grade Social Studies*. Retrieved September 27, 2016, from Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction: www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/acre/standards/new-standards/social-studies/3-5.pdf

Zinsser, W. (1998). *Inventing Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. This is a resource book written by five different writers as a firsthand account of the rewards and challenges of writing a memoir.