



## Age Ain't Nothing But A Number

By Monique Hall, 2024 CTI Fellow in Integrating Aging Education in the PK - 12 Curriculum:  
Combating Ageism through the Classroom

Devonshire Elementary

This curriculum unit is recommended for 3rd, 4th and 5th Grade Students.

This curriculum unit is designed for introducing students to Centenarians which can foster respect and appreciation for older adults.

Keywords: centenarians, ageism, bias, stereotypes, perseverance, determination, resilience, values, theme

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

Synopsis: In this unit, young scholars will explore the lives of centenarians who are people who have lived 100 years or more, and the concept of aging. Teaching about ageism is important for several reasons. By introducing elementary students to centenarians, it fosters respect for older generations, raises awareness about longevity of life, and sparks interest in history and culture. It also highlights the importance of diversity and individuality, promotes meaningful intergenerational connections, and encourages students to reflect on their own values and perspectives on aging.

This unit aligns with the North Carolina mathematical standards and the lessons will be used in conjunction with CMS curriculum.

This curriculum will be taught adjacent to the 100th day of school. This will be a school wide- initiative.

I plan to teach this unit during this school year to 40 students in the 4th grade.

I give permission for CTI to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as an author for my work.

## **Age Ain't Nothing But a Number: Using literature about Centenarians to Combating Ageism in the classroom**

Monique Hall

### **Introduction**

My name is Monique Hall and I work as a 4th grade teacher at Devonshire Elementary in Charlotte, North Carolina. I teach 4th grade math and science to 45 students. Out of 45 students, Multi Language (ML), make up 73%, African American students make up 19% and White students make up 8%. Out of those 45 students, 11% have been diagnosed with ADHD and 78% are below reading level and 65% are below math level according to I-Ready Scores.

Our school has faced challenges as evidenced by our recent test scores which show 14% of students scored at or above proficient in reading and 14% scored at or above proficient in mathematics. Compared to the district average, students at Devonshire scored worse in reading and worse in mathematics. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 41% of students tested at or above the proficient level for reading, and 37% tested at or above that level for mathematics.

Unfortunately, Devonshire's overall score for the 2023-2024 school year was an F. We, as a school, are still on the failing schools list.

### **Demographics**

The school is located in The East Learning Community and made up of 67.5% Hispanic students, 25.9% African American students and 2.6% White students. We have close to 560 students in grades K-5. The school enrolls 99% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Devonshire has 40 full time teachers, 83% are certified and 86.9% of teachers have 3 or more years of experience. I am a 4th grade teacher in a departmentalized structure and I teach Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Math and Science.

### **Unit goals**

After completing this Curriculum Unit, students will be able to:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.10-Demonstrate understanding of text while actively engaging in group reading of stories, dramas, and poetry for a clearly stated purpose (e.g., Read or listen to a story to identify the narrator. Read or listen to a story to compare the main characters.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4- With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the organization is appropriate to the task and purpose. (Throughout, writing can include standard

writing instruments, computers or alternative writing tools.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4.1-Demonstrate understanding of standard English grammar and usage when communicating.

4.1 Nutrition and Physical Education -Apply tools (MyPlate, Food Facts Label) to plan healthy nutrition and fitness.

SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. a. Come to discussions prepared

### **Rationale**

As I continue to evolve in how I set up my classroom every year, I know it is important for students to see people who look like them in their learning environment. This has made me reflect on the images I have displayed in my classroom. Diverse representations should be all around the classroom. It never occurred to me before, not only should the images contain people of diverse backgrounds but people of all ages as well. There are many people in society who have gone on to complete many remarkable feats later on in their lives. Students should see those images reflected within the classroom, so they can recognize it is never too late to dream big and/or accomplish your goals.

Integrating Aging Education in the PK-12 Curriculum isn't as straightforward as it might seem. I need to be intentional about the resources I select and the lessons I create as aging education is integrated into the curriculum as part of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons. This is an opportunity for me to help shape healthy attitudes about aging, both for my students and myself.

Students and teachers bring their own biases and experiences about aging into the classroom. I want to have the knowledge and self-awareness to recognize my own biases about aging and experiences to integrate aging into the curriculum in a positive and healthy way. The research has shown me how my words can perpetuate negative views about aging and what it means to age within your years in the classroom, other professions and personal endeavors chosen. I thought I was making a joke when I would say to a student "You know the old lady can hear you." Since taking this course, I have learned I am perpetuating a stereotype about aging by associating it with lack of hearing. Our words matter and as educators, we should use our words to help change negative perceptions of older adults.

### **Topic**

This Curriculum Unit (CU) will introduce students to centenarians who have achieved remarkable feats at 100 years old and beyond. The aim is to show students that aging doesn't mean a loss of productivity or capability.

**Students:** I will be teaching this unit to my 4th grade students during our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) time.

**How does your topic idea connect with your students lives?**

Devonshire has a diverse cultural make up of students. Countries such as Japan, China, Korea and Vietnam value the wisdom of elders and treat them with a great deal of respect. Centering around the 100 days of school, I want to “take students around the world” by introducing them to various centenarians who have done extraordinary things later in their lives. This topic is especially relevant to student’s lives because some of our students are living with or being raised by grandparents. By having students learn about centenarians, they can begin to see age doesn’t stop you from living a fulfilling and productive life. The centenarians students learn about in the Curriculum Unit will be a sharp contrast to the images portrayed of elders centered around the 100th day of school. Last year on 100th day celebration, our principal dressed in glasses, a nightgown, bathrobe, slippers and rollers. The previous year she even wore a cane. By dressing like this, students associate getting older with wearing glasses and walking with a cane. Older adults are not a monolith. Each ages differently.

**Content Research**

According to *Problems of Ageism in Literature*, (Kettering, 2023), “Today the fastest growing minority in the world is “senior citizens.” Their voices are being heard in all facets of society; the economy, politics, the sciences, the media, and education. While we have become sensitive to the issues of racism and sexism, we have neglected to confront the needs of our older population.” In other words, aging is often seen as something that erases individual differences, grouping all older adults into one category. However, like race and gender, aging is not something people can choose. It’s a natural progression of life. As educators, we need to address the stereotypes about older people. Literature, which forms the core of education, is a powerful tool for tackling this issue because it reflects and shapes a society’s beliefs and values. However, when we examine past and present literature, we find that older individuals have often been stereotyped and depicted negatively. This leads to “ageism” which is a term that describes discrimination against older adults.

*Ageism Unmasked*, it states, “The sophisticated, fast-growing use of digital technology in its many guises has been determinative of social hierarchies that dictate societal norms and values. As a result, A new type of age discrimination in the form of digital ageism has evolved, adding new terms to our lexica such as digital exclusion and technophobia.” These sentences spoke volumes because it means, these hierarchies of digital technology dictate what is considered acceptable, important, or valuable in society. Digital technology, in its various forms, is a powerful force that helps define and reinforce these social dynamics of digital ageism. What is frightening about this thinking is, technology usage doesn’t have an age restriction so older adults should not be judged for their usage and/or lack of usage of technology. Technology usage is based on comfortability and attitude toward technology usage, how usage of technology is perceived as beneficial to the user, education and/or socioeconomic status.

What is also interesting about chapter six, (Gendron, 2022) is its fitting title, “The (Mis) information Age.” The title highlights how false and misleading information shapes society’s views on not just race and politics but also on aging and older adults. It suggests that stereotypes, myths and inaccuracies about aging are key factors contributing to ageism. “Misinformation” here refers to the widespread, incorrect beliefs that paint aging in a negative light, such as the very ideas that older people are weak, unproductive, or less capable. These misconceptions fuel discrimination and bias against older adults. The chapter’s title examines how this false information spreads through media, culture, and education, reinforcing negative attitudes about aging. Lastly, the importance of the title is that it calls attention to the need to challenge and correct these misconceptions. It urges replacing ageist stereotypes with a more realistic and positive view of aging, ultimately “unmasking” ageism and fostering a more inclusive and respectful approach to aging in society.

In his Ted Talk ‘How to be 100+’ Dan Buettner explores the lifestyles of centenarians in Blue Zones (regions where people live longer, healthier, fulfilling lives.) Buettner’s work counters the negative assumptions about aging. His work highlights that centenarians are active, engaged and vibrant members of their communities. This dispels the myth that aging always leads to decline and irrelevance.

Buttner emphasizes the importance of social connections, meaningful work and a sense of purpose in achieving longevity. By learning about centenarians, we can foster a culture that respects and supports aging as a natural, positive stage of life.

There are plenty of books for young scholars that help dispel stereotypes about aging. Such reads are, “*Old to Joy*” by Anita Crawford Clark, Captain Sir Tom Moore’s “*ONE HUNDRED STEPS*”, “*The Delany Sisters, Reach High*,” by Amy Hill Hearth, “*Fauja Singh Keeps Going*” by Simran Jeet Singh, “*The Lobster Lady Maine’s 102 year old Legend*,” by Barbara A Walsh and “*The Oldest Student, How May Walker Learned to Read*.” by Rita Lorraine Hubbard and Oge Mora.

Reading any and all of the books listed above to students will help dispel myths about aging by providing inspiring examples that challenge common stereotypes about older adults. These books tell the stories of people who learned new things, challenged themselves and acquired new skills which emphasizes that older people can continue to grow intellectually.

These stories also dispel the myths of declining abilities with age. These stories show young people it is never too late to acquire new skills and aging doesn’t mean it is a time of decline and inactivity. It also shows young people that older adults can be active, motivated, and capable of achieving remarkable goals. By reading these books, students learn to value the experiences and wisdom of older people, which fosters respect and appreciation for older generations.

One of the things we want students to learn is we are always learning and growing because we are lifelong learners. These literary pieces teach education, activism and passion for living

and life is a lifelong journey and aging is not an endpoint but a continuous opportunity for growth and learning. These texts also show older adults as individuals who are relatable because they are capable of experiencing accomplishments that counter the negative portrayals of older adults in media and culture. These literary texts help young readers see aging in a more positive, hopeful light which challenges the myth that growing older means limitations and/or decline. By sharing these stories about centenarians we can begin to change how society views aging. Recognizing the strengths and contributions of older adults is an integral part in building a more inclusive society.

### **Instructional Implementation**

#### Lesson Plans

#### **Lesson 1 Fauja Singh Keeps Going by Simran Jeet Singh**

Duration: 1-2 class periods (45-60 minutes each)

#### Learning Targets

- I can learn about centenarians and recognize we can have an amazing long, fulfilling life even in the presence of chronic challenges which after 80 many of us will have.
- I can explore the story of Fauja Singh, a 100-year-old marathon runner, and discuss themes of perseverance and determination.
- I can reflect on the importance of healthy living and setting personal goals.
- I can appreciate the value of determination and how positive lifestyle choices can impact longevity.

#### Materials Needed

- The book [\*Fauja Singh Keeps Going\*](#) (14:00 last 1:40 talks more about his life), by Simran Jeet Singh
- Goal Setting [worksheet](#)

#### Introduction (10-15 minutes)

##### **Activate Prior Knowledge:**

Ask students if they know anyone who is 100 or older, and discuss what life might be like for someone who has lived for over a century.

Explain that a "centenarian" is someone who is 100 years old or older.

Briefly introduce Fauja Singh and share that he is a centenarian who started running marathons at the age of 89.

**Reading Activity:**

Read *Fauja Singh Keeps Going* aloud to the class or listen to the read aloud.

Pause periodically to discuss key points or ask comprehension questions. For example, ask, "Why do you think Fauja didn't give up?" or "What challenges did he face, and how did he overcome them?"

Discussion (15-20 minutes)

**Explore Themes from the Story:**

Ask the students: "What do you think helped Fauja Singh keep going even when things were difficult?"

Discuss themes of perseverance, setting goals, and never giving up.

**Learning About Centenarians:**

Explain some general characteristics of centenarians, such as healthy lifestyle choices, community involvement, and mental persistence.

Discuss the cultural and social factors that might contribute to long life.

**Activity 1: Goal Setting (15-20 minutes)****Worksheet Activity:**

Students can use this [document](#) to write their goals.

Encourage students to think about what they can do to achieve these goals and what obstacles they might need to overcome.

**Class Sharing:**

Ask a few students to share their goals with the class. Discuss how they can persevere like Fauja Singh when things get tough.

Activity 2: Staying Active (Optional, 15-20 minutes)

- Organize a short class exercise or stretching session to emphasize the importance of physical activity.
- If time permits, show a short video clip of [Fauja Singh running](#) (5:33) to inspire the students.

Closing (5-10 minutes)

**Reflect on the Lesson:**

Ask students: "What did you learn from Fauja Singh's story?"

Summarize the discussion about perseverance and making healthy choices.

Assessment

- Participation in discussions and activities.
- Completion of goal-setting worksheet and sharing of ideas.
- Optional: Students can write a short paragraph about what perseverance means to them.

Cross Curriculum Ideas

- **Social Studies Connection:** Research famous athletes and/or para athletes who have overcome challenges.
- **Math Connection:** Use Fauja Singh's marathon times or distances run to explore math problems.
- **Art Connection:** Have students draw or create a poster about perseverance, featuring Fauja Singh.
- **Literacy Connection:** Have students interview an older person they know and ask about their life experiences and any advice they would give about staying healthy and happy.

*On April 1, 2024 Fauja Singh turned 113 years old.*

## **Lesson 2 The Lobster Lady, Maines 102 year old Legend by Barbara A. Walsh**

**Lesson Plan: SEL, *The Lobster Lady***

Duration: 1-2 class periods (45-60 minutes)

Learning Targets

- I can learn about Virginia Oliver, a lobstering centenarian, and discuss themes of hard work, resilience, and dedication.
- I can learn the importance of respecting different occupations and ways of life.
- I can discuss how I can persevere in the face of challenges.
- I can help students understand and appreciate the value of perseverance and resilience, while learning to foster respect for different occupations and ways of life.



## Materials Needed

- The book [\*The Lobster Lady\*](#), by Alexandra S. D. Hinrichs (read aloud 7:43)
- [Writing Prompt Worksheet](#)

## Introduction (10-15 minutes)

### Introduction to the Story:

Ask the class if anyone knows what lobstering is and where it's typically done.

Explain that *The Lobster Lady* tells the true story of Virginia Oliver, the oldest lobsterman in Maine, who has been lobstering for more than 90 years.

Share a little about the life of a [lobster person](#) (Virginia Oliver) 2:24 and how it's both rewarding and challenging.

### Reading Activity:

Read *The Lobster Lady* aloud to the class.

Pause periodically to discuss or ask questions, such as, "What do you think motivates Virginia to keep lobstering for such a long time?" "How does she feel about the ocean and her work?"

## Discussion (15-20 minutes)

### Exploring SEL Themes from the Story:

Discuss Virginia's dedication to lobstering and how she continues doing what she loves. Ask, "What do you think gives her the strength to keep going?"

Discuss the concept of resilience, using Virginia's story to illustrate it. Discuss times when students have faced challenges and what helped them get through those moments.

Explore the idea of respecting different ways of life, including jobs that may not always get a lot of attention, like lobstering.

### Values and Motivation:

Ask students: "Why do you think Virginia continues lobstering? What values or beliefs does she seem to hold?"

Have students share what activities or hobbies are important to them, and discuss how values can motivate us to keep doing the things we love, even when they're difficult.

Activity: Reflection and Goal Setting (20 minutes)

**Worksheet Activity:**

Hand out a worksheet with prompts for students to reflect on what perseverance means to them and how they can show resilience in their own lives. Prompts could include:

"A time I had to keep going even though it was hard was..."

"Something I love doing and never want to give up is..."

"One way I can be resilient like Virginia is..."

**Class Sharing:**

Invite students to share their writings. Discuss common themes in their experiences, such as hard work, patience, and determination.

Closing (5-10 minutes)

**Reflect on the Lesson:**

Summarize the discussion by highlighting how Virginia Oliver's story teaches us throughout our lives we can continue pursuing our passions and using our passion to live with purpose and joy.

Assessment

- Participation in discussions and activities.
- Completion of the writing prompt worksheet.

Cross Curriculum Ideas

- **Science Connection:** Study the life cycle of lobsters and the ecosystem of the ocean.
- **Social Studies Connection:** Explore the history and culture of lobstering in North Carolina. (appears seasonally of the coast of the outer banks)
- **Art Connection:** Create a class mural or students can draw a picture of an activity they enjoy doing

- **Literacy Connection:** Students write a few sentences about why an activity is important to them and how they can keep improving at it.

***Virginia Oliver turned 104 June 7, 2024***

Lesson Plan: SEL, *The Delany Sisters Reach High*

Grade Level: 3rd - 5th Grade

Duration: 1 -2 class periods (45-60 minutes)

Learning Targets

- I can learn about the Delany sisters, who lived past 100 years and made significant contributions during their lifetimes.
- I can explore themes of resilience, goal setting, and learning from life's experiences.
- I can reflect on my goals from the previous lesson and the values I hold that can help me overcome challenges.

Materials Needed

- The book *The Delany Sisters Reach High* by Amy Hill Hearth
- [Reflection Worksheet](#)
- [Pictures of the Delany Sisters](#)

Introduction (10-15 minutes)

**Background on the Delany Sisters:**

Explain that the Delany sisters, Sarah ("Sadie") and Annie Elizabeth ("Bessie"), lived to be over 100 years old and achieved many great things in their lifetimes.

Discuss how they grew up during a time of significant change in American history and faced many challenges, including discrimination, but they never gave up on their goals.

**Reading Activity:**

Read *The Delany Sisters Reach High* aloud to the class.

Pause to discuss important points in the story, such as the values the sisters held, the obstacles they overcame, and the determination they showed throughout their lives.

Discussion (15-20 minutes)

### **Exploring SEL Themes from the Story:**

Ask students what challenges the Delany sisters faced and how they overcame them.

Discuss resilience, using the sisters' story as an example. Ask students, "What can we learn from Sadie and Bessie about staying strong and never giving up even when things get hard?"

Talk about how setting goals and the importance of education, perseverance, and having a positive attitude can help you persevere through challenging situations.

### **Learning from Life Experiences:**

Explain how the Delany sisters used their [life experiences](#) (7:00) to grow stronger. Ask, "What can you learn from your own experiences, and how can that help you reach your goals?"

Discuss the importance of family support, community, and standing up for what is right.

Create a timeline about the Delany Sisters (their father was born a slave and emancipated, lived through Jim Crow Era, lived through the Civil Rights Era)

Activity: Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

### **Timeline Worksheet Activity:**

Hand out or share [timeline worksheet](#) online. (students can create their own)

### **Class Discussion:**

Invite a few volunteers to share their timelines with the class. Discuss how values like resilience, hard work, and kindness can help them achieve their goals.

**Sample Questions** (alternate to timeline) are in the back of the book.

These classroom ideas were created by Cynthia Hancock, Tina M. K. Newsham and Sarah Tesar.

1. "Many things have changed from the Delany sisters' childhood to now. For example, there were ten children in the Delany family, and all four girls slept in one room, while

the six boys slept in another. Each had their own cot. Can you draw their bedroom and your bedroom? What are the biggest differences?”

2. “As children the Delany sisters didn’t have a lot of things, but they were happy. What do you think made them happy? What makes you happy that isn’t a thing? Image what your life would be like if you love to be 100. Draw a picture or describe what you think you might do or enjoy at that age?”
3. “Sadie and Bessie lived in a community where they had many older adults in their lives, Uncle Jesse, Mr. Holloway, and Culot, for example. Each of those adults played an important role in the sisters’ lives. Do you know any older adults? What role do they play in your life?”
4. “Can you think of some big historical events that occurred in the sister’s lives? What are some historical events that both the sisters and your grandparents or great grandparents would have experienced?”

### **Classroom discussion:**

Invite a volunteer to discuss their answer and/or show their drawing depending on what question was answered.

Closing (5-10 minutes)

### **Reflect on the Lesson:**

Ask students to think about what qualities they share with the Delany sisters.

Summarize the discussion by highlighting how the Delany sisters' story teaches us to never give up on our dreams, no matter the obstacles.

### **Assessment**

- Participation in discussions and activities.
- Completion of timeline.

### **Extension Ideas**

- **Social Studies Connection:** Explore the time period in which the Delany sisters lived and discuss how history shaped their experiences.
- **Art Connection:** Have students create a drawing or collage that represents resilience and overcoming challenges.
- **Literacy/ Writing Connection:** Have students write a letter to their future selves about a goal they want to achieve and what they will do to stay resilient along the way.

*Sarah ‘Sadie’ Delany died in 1999 at the age of 109*

***Bessie Delany died in 1994 at the age of 104***

**Lesson Plan: *One Hundred Steps: The Story of Captain Sir Tom Moore***

Grade Level: 3rd - 5th Grade

Duration: 1-2 class periods (45-60 minutes)

**Learning Targets**

- I can learn about Captain Sir Tom Moore, who raised money for charity by walking 100 laps in his garden at the age of 99.
- I can explore themes of perseverance, kindness, and community.
- I can reflect on how small actions can make a big difference and discuss ways they can contribute positively to their community.

**Materials Needed**

- The book [\*One Hundred Steps: The Story of Captain Sir Tom Moore\*](#) (read aloud 9:07)
- [Video clip](#) about Captain Tom (3:10)
- [Writing Prompt Worksheet](#)

Introduction (10-15 minutes)

**Background on Captain Sir Tom Moore:**

Explain who Captain Sir Tom Moore was, sharing how he served in the military during World War II and later became known for raising millions of dollars for charity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Share that at the age of 99, Captain Tom took on a challenge to walk 100 laps in his garden to support healthcare workers, which inspired many people around the world.

**Reading Activity:**

Read *One Hundred Steps: The Story of Captain Sir Tom Moore* aloud to the class.

Pause to discuss important points in the story, such as his determination, the support he received from others, and the impact his actions had on the community.

Discussion (15-20 minutes)

**Exploring SEL Themes from the Story:**

Ask students what challenges Captain Tom faced during his life and what helped him stay strong.

Discuss the idea of perseverance. Ask, "What can we learn from Captain Tom about continuing to work toward a goal, even when it seems difficult?"

Talk about the concept of kindness and how one person's actions can inspire others to do good.

### **The Impact of Small Actions:**

Discuss how Captain Tom's small steps in his garden grew into a huge movement that raised millions for charity. Ask students, "How can small actions create a big impact?"

Encourage students to think about ways they can contribute positively to their own neighborhood or school communities, no matter how small the action may seem.

Activity: Reflection and Goal Setting (20 minutes)

### **Worksheet Activity:**

- "A small action I can take to help others is..."
- "When I face a challenge, I can show perseverance by..."
- "One thing I learned from Captain Tom is..."

### **Class Sharing:**

Invite a few volunteers to share their reflections with the class. Discuss how the students' ideas can be put into action and what impact they might have.

Closing (5-10 minutes)

### **Reflect on the Lesson:**

Ask students to think about the qualities they share with Captain Tom. What values do they have that help them keep going and make a difference?

Summarize the discussion by highlighting how perseverance, kindness, and small acts of service can positively impact others.

### Assessment

- Participation in discussions and activities.
- Completion of writing prompt.
- Optional: Students can write a short paragraph about what perseverance or kindness means to them, using examples from Captain Tom's story or their own experiences.

### Extension Ideas

- **Social Studies Connection:** Research more about World War II and Captain Tom's military service. Discuss how different generations show resilience in different ways.
- **Science Connection:** Explore the benefits of walking and staying active for health and well-being.
- **Art Connection:** Have students create posters encouraging acts of kindness or perseverance in the school community.
- **SEL Connection:** Encourage students to take one action over the next week to help someone or contribute to their community, then write about what they did and how it made them feel.

Lesson Plan: SEL *The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read*

Grade Level: 3rd - 5th Grade

Duration: 1-2 class periods (45-60 minutes)

### Learning Targets

- I can learn about Mary Walker, who learned to read at the age of 116, despite the challenges she faced throughout her life.
- I can explore themes of resilience, lifelong learning, and the value of setting goals.
- I can reflect on my own learning journeys and discuss ways to stay motivated and overcome obstacles.

### Materials Needed

- The book [\*The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read\*](#) (11:02), by Rita Lorraine Hubbard
- [My Favorite Book Worksheet](#)
- [Video clip](#) (2:48) or pictures related to Mary Walker's life



## Introduction (10-15 minutes)

### **Background on Mary Walker:**

Introduce Mary Walker, explaining that she was born into slavery and lived a long life of over 100 years, facing many challenges along the way.

Share that despite not being able to learn to read when she was young, she achieved her goal at age 116.

Ask students to consider what it would be like to wait that long to achieve a goal and what qualities someone would need to keep going.

### **Reading Activity:**

Read *The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read* aloud to the class.

Pause periodically to discuss key points in the story, such as the challenges Mary faced, her determination to learn to read, and the significance of her accomplishment.

## Discussion (15-20 minutes)

### **Exploring SEL Themes from the Story:**

Ask students what obstacles Mary Walker faced throughout her life and how she stayed resilient.

Discuss the concept of lifelong learning. Ask, "What does Mary Walker's story teach us about the importance of continuing to learn, no matter our age?"

Talk about setting goals and not giving up, even when something seems difficult or takes a long time.

### **Reflecting on Personal Challenges:**

Encourage students to think about times when they struggled to learn something new. Ask, "How did you feel when it was difficult? What helped you keep trying?"

Discuss strategies for staying motivated and overcoming frustration, using Mary's story as an example of patience and perseverance.

Activity: Reflection and Goal Setting (20 minutes)

**My Favorite Book Activity:**

Hand out My Favorite Book worksheet.

**Class Sharing:**

Invite a few volunteers to share their favorite book and why with the class.

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

**Reflect on the Lesson:**

Ask students to think about what qualities they share with Mary Walker, such as perseverance, patience, or a love of learning.

Summarize the discussion by highlighting the value of setting goals, continuing to learn, and staying resilient in the face of challenges.

Assessment

- Participation in discussions and activities.
- Completion of My Favorite Book Worksheet and sharing of ideas.

Extension Ideas

- **Social Studies Connection:** Explore the history of education for African Americans and how it has changed over time.
- **Art Connection:** Students will create a picture of their favorite part of the book they chose as their favorite.
- **Writing Connection:** Encourage students to interview a family member or community member about a skill they learned as an adult and write about what inspired them to keep learning.
- **Sel:** Students can write a short paragraph about what lifelong learning means to them, using examples from their own lives or Mary Walker's story.

***Mary Walker died in 1969 at the age of 121.***

## Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

### **Content and teaching standards targeted during this curriculum unit**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.10-Demonstrate understanding of text while actively engaging in group reading of stories, dramas, and poetry for a clearly stated purpose (e.g., Read or listen to a story to identify the narrator. Read or listen to a story to compare the main characters.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4- With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the organization is appropriate to the task and purpose. (Throughout, writing can include standard writing instruments, computers or alternative writing tools.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4.1-Demonstrate understanding of standard English grammar and usage when communicating.

4.1 Nutrition and Physical Education -Apply tools (MyPlate, Food Facts Label) to plan healthy nutrition and fitness.

SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. a. Come to discussions prepared

## **Materials List**

## **Student Resources**

### **Lesson 1**

The book [Fauja Singh Keeps Going](#) by Simran Jeet Singh

Students can use this [document](#) to write their goals.

### **Lesson 2**

The book [The Lobster Lady](#), by Alexandra S. D. Hinrichs

Students can use the [Writing prompt worksheet](#) to reflect on what perseverance means to them and how they can show resilience in their own lives.

### **Lesson 3**

The book *The Delany Sisters Reach High* by Amy Hill Hearth

The story [Reflection Worksheet](#)

[Pictures of the Delany Sisters](#)

[Student Timeline](#)

### **Lesson 4**

The book [One Hundred Steps: The Story of Captain Sir Tom Moore](#) (read aloud 9:07)

[Video clip](#) about Captain Tom (3:10)

[Writing Prompt](#)

### **Lesson 5**

The book [The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read](#) (11:02), by Rita Lorraine Hubbard

[My Favorite Book Worksheet](#)

[Video clip](#) (2:48) or pictures related to Mary Walker's life

### **Culminating Activity**

My overall idea is students will start learning about centenarians leading up to the 100th day of school. On the 100th day of school, students will give presentations about a centenarian we have learned about. We will either present centenarians as “wax museum” figures or they will talk about their person on our school news “The Dolphin Talk Waves.”

### **Teacher Resources**

#### **Anchor Texts:**

*Singh, Simran Jeet, Fauja Singh Keeps Going, New York, Penguin Random House LLC, 2020*

*Walsh, Barbara A., The Lobster Lady, Maine’s 102 year old Legend, Irish Rover Press, 2022*

*Hearth, Amy Hill, Delany Sisters Reach High, Chapel Hill UNC Press, 2023*

*Captain Sir Tom Moore, One Hundred Steps, Penguin Random House, 2020*

*Rita Lorraine Hubbard, The Oldest Student, New York, Penguin Random House LLC, 2020*

### **Connections to other subjects**

This Curriculum Unit (CU) connects with several subjects, including Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), literacy, health and science. It will offer students a well-rounded engaging way to think about aging and the lives of centenarians.

### **Bibliography**

Problems of Ageism in Literature, Charles F Kettering

Ageism Unmasked, Tracey Gendron PHD, 2022

Buettner, Dan (Ted Talk 19:39) YouTube, uploaded by TEDxEC, September 2009 [How to Live to be 100+](#)

*Simran Jeet Singh, Fauja Singh Keeps Going, New York, Penguin Random House LLC, 2020*

*Walsh, Barbara A, The Lobster Lady, Maine's 102 year old Legend, Irish Rover Press, 2022*

*Hearth, Amy Hill, Delany Sisters Reach High, Chapel Hill UNC Press, 2023*

Hancock, Cynthia , Newsham, Tina and Tesar, Sarah, Classroom ideas in The Delany Sisters Reach High, Chapel Hill UNC Press, 2023

*Tom Moore, Captain Sir, One Hundred Steps, Penguin Random House UK, 2020*

*Hubbard, Rita Lorraine The Oldest Student, New York, Penguin Random House LLC, 2020*