



***Bypassing and Negating the ‘Single Story’
to Create True Community Through Memoir***

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Literacy - Writing with Art & Technology Integration grades 3-5

Keywords: memoir, writing, writer’s workshop, student-led conferences,

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

Synopsis: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has coined the term “single story” to refer to people or groups who are relegated to one encompassing, preconceived story, usually erroneous, to describe their lives.¹ This judgmental view is demeaning to individuals and detrimental to society. This unit strives to use the writing of Memoirs and the sharing of these to tear down the single story mindset in our classroom and to create an understanding and informed, classroom community. We will use writing practices and exercises to reinforce the proper use of the writing process, along with the use of mentor text for modeling. Our unit will include various tools and activities structured so as to enable connections between the students’ memories and their writing. The students will share their pieces throughout the creation process and will receive feedback from their peers which will also facilitate building community. The final culmination of this unit will be an Authors’ Sharing Celebration that coincides with our quarterly student-led conferences.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to fifteen students in Literacy (Writing), with an Art & Technology Integration in grades 3-5.

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

Introduction

Students enter the fall of the school year with many regressions, often referred to as the “summer slide”. Although this is noticed primarily in mathematics, the summer slide occurs in all subjects, including writing. Compounding this regression is the variability of abilities that students have within the subject of writing. Even with students who like to write, the beginning of the school year brings students whose pens have run dry from non-use. They are stuck in their summer days, and the creative juices for writing may need to be primed. They need a style of writing, a genre, that they can easily slide into, a genre that gives them choice and voice in what they write. According to Tara Gibney, “Memoir can be an accessible genre for all students because everyone has a story to tell.”² This is true, but sometimes they need some help discovering that story - hence the purposeful teaching of memoir. Katherine Boomer writes,

Writing memoir becomes an individualistic and community-minded act, engaging even the struggling writer.³

My personal interest in developing this curriculum unit study came as a result of reflection on my own stage in life. As I watch my own children now have children of their own, I realize that I have many stories to tell and history of my life that needs to be shared in a way that only I could share. I want my grandchildren to know the history of their family and their extended family, as well as to know how life has changed in our world in a seemingly brief period of time. What I did not expect in learning about writing memoirs was that I would rediscover “forgotten” memories and that I would gain new insights into my past.

My personal interest in memoir writing led me to begin to think about how this genre is rarely taught in our classrooms, and that teaching students to reflect on their own lives through writing might make them more engaged as writers. This is important because I have many students who are reluctant to write and I want to make my classroom more inviting for them as writers.

Student Background

I teach a fourth & fifth grade combo class at an elementary school comprised of around 610 students. My school is unique, in that we have four separate programs making up our overall student population. Our school consists of extremely high performing students (the Horizons program), academically gifted students (our Talent Development program), classes for K-2 students who have shown potential to be in our TD program (the Learning Immersion students), and our “Academy” students who come largely from our surrounding neighborhood. We are a “Title I” school, which means that at least 75% of our student population is at poverty level. Our school’s racial makeup is diverse and we have a high level of parent involvement, especially within our Horizon’s and TD programs. My current students are all a part of the Horizons program. These students are very high achieving (the Horizons program is made up of students who are two to three grade levels above their peers). Also, this year I have the advantage of “looping” with many of my students; out of the eleven students in my main class, I taught nine of them last year. Within my class I have 8 boys and 3 girls. I also occasionally have three to five third graders who join our class periodically. I teach Literacy every day for between one and

one-half hours and two hours, but that includes reading, writing, and word work (vocabulary and grammar). My classroom is a “One-to-One” technology class as all of my students are able to use one of the school Chromebooks when needed. The students in my current class also come from middle to upper class homes and they have computer and internet access in their homes.

Unit Goals

In North Carolina where I teach, writing is no longer a tested subject, at least not in the category of an end of year high-stakes test, and as a result, there is very little emphasis placed on it in the curriculum. The sad fact is that teachers tend to teach what is tested! Because of this teachers need to be proactive and purposeful in teaching writing and need an easy or straightforward way to do this.

Incorporating personal writing in students' education may seem like a waste of time to those who emphasize acquiring skills and mastering content, but countless writing teachers at every level have seen otherwise. We've seen the uninterested student come to life telling his or her story; we've seen the insecure, stammering child become a self-assured, rhetorically aware powerhouse; and we've seen a classroom of strangers become a community of writers. Yes, personal writing is messy business, but in this teacher's opinion, it's worth the risk.⁴

This curriculum unit will utilize the writing style of memoir to engage students in the writing process, to engage other teachers, and to help our class come together as a community.

This unit will be built around a series of mini lessons, to be taught so as to equip the students with knowledge of their writing process. The mini lessons will use mentor texts, teacher examples, student samples and much discussion. Students will be encouraged to build an inventory of “moment stories” or “snippets” that they work on over time. Eventually the students will be expected to pick one or two of these to publish on our class website, but multiple stories will be shared with their classmates and parents.

At the end of the unit, there will be a sharing celebration for students to share some of their memoir collections with school staff, other students and their parents and outside visitors. This will be in conjunction with our student-led conferences.

In addition to the Literacy focus, this unit will include Art (student creation of pictures, maps and graphics), as well as Technology (the digital publication of memoir on student created google sites). (For full delineation of teaching standards, please see Appendix 1.)

Content Research

The genre of Memoir as I refer to it in this unit can be defined as a “slice-of-life story”⁵ which provides the opportunity for the student to explore their life with retrospective reflection and may take them through a time of self-discovery. Another definition of memoir, offered by Lucy Calkins, states that memoir stories often have a “sense that the text is being written by someone older and wiser, who is now looking back in order to make sense of past experience.”⁶ There is no intent on the writers’ part to encapsulate one’s entire life, but instead to write about snippets or moments from their lives, with an “effort to say something big and important about himself or herself.”⁷

Because gifted children are often perfectionists who want to do a task the right way the first time, writing can become especially frustrating. The children in my class are typical of academically gifted students in that they do not like to struggle with assignments and certainly do not like to perform a task over or be given a task that they think is ‘below them’. Students in general, but especially gifted students are obsessed with doing things right the first time and not having to revise or edit their work - which becomes a hurdle when progressing through the writing process.⁸ The hurdle with many gifted children is that they just do not like to write. It is not unusual for them to sit and stare at a blank page in a notebook in total frustration. They find themselves stymied as to how to start a writing piece. In part this is because gifted children “have a fear of nebulous concepts and prefer to study things that have a right answer.”⁹

The obsession to be perfect and to do things perfectly with the first attempt must be overcome in the elementary classroom. Students need to be taught that struggle, whether it comes when revising their work, or when attempting a new concept, is a positive part of the learning process. In my classroom, we spend a fair amount of time discussing the Growth Mindset. The Growth Mindset is a philosophy that believes that peoples’ most basic abilities can grow through dedication and hard work; that the talent one is born with is just a starting point. Included in this mindset is the belief that failure and frustration are roads to success.¹⁰ Indeed, research has shown that growth in the brain actually occurs with challenge and struggle, these are necessary components to forming new neurons in our brains.¹¹ The first couple of weeks of school every year include lessons that highlight this mindset as it pertains to every subject. Since the writing process includes editing and revising text, often in conjunction with peer input, it is important to understand that this process helps us to grow in our thinking.

Additionally, I want to use this unit to really get to know my students and to further build a classroom community. My classroom population includes students from diverse backgrounds -- Asian-Indian, African, and Iranian families -- and from varied religions as well, and I would like the students to utilize memoir as a vehicle to explore their various multicultural backgrounds and to share those by way of writing, art, and technology.

In a very thought provoking TED talk given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “*The Danger of a Single Story*”, she discussed the necessity to move beyond the “one, single story” mentality.¹² A “single story” as she describes it is when a person falsely knows and judges others based on one small part of another person’s story that they know or assume to know.

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”¹³ -Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The single story being that with which we often pre-label a person based on our perceived understanding of their culture, gender, status, etc. Adichie warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk critical misunderstandings. I feel that in most classrooms, students as well as teachers are guilty of this. Because we do not take the time to truly get to know each other, students often erroneously believe something about another student based on what they think or judge to be true. My hope is that as students share these memoirs with their peers they will get a glimpse into the real person who is their classmate.

We have the responsibility as teachers of children to teach our students how to listen to, read, and understand the stories of their peers.¹⁴ Overcoming this single-story mentality within the classroom can be accomplished by the writing and sharing of memoirs by the students. Additionally, as children share their writing pieces, they begin to see areas of similarities within their stories, whether those similarities are struggles or celebrations. These similarities lead to “me too” moments.¹⁵ The insight received from the breaking down of the single story and the resulting me-too moments that students share will foster a new sense of community in our classrooms.

Memoir in our class becomes the vehicle for students to break free of the fixed mindset, to get past our single story mentalities, and to become reflective, thoughtful individuals. We expand our fixed mindset to one of growth, as we edit and revise our stories, understanding that this is a good and healthy thing for us to do. Students’ writings are also a means for students to share the bits and pieces, the moments of their lives with each other, in a revealing manner that allows their peers to see sides of them that might otherwise go undiscovered. Memoir sharing will help the students to break away from the “single story” mentality and become aware of each other’s true lives. Finally, Memoir is also the vehicle for my students to become increasingly retrospective and reflective of their past and even present day lives.

Instructional Implementation

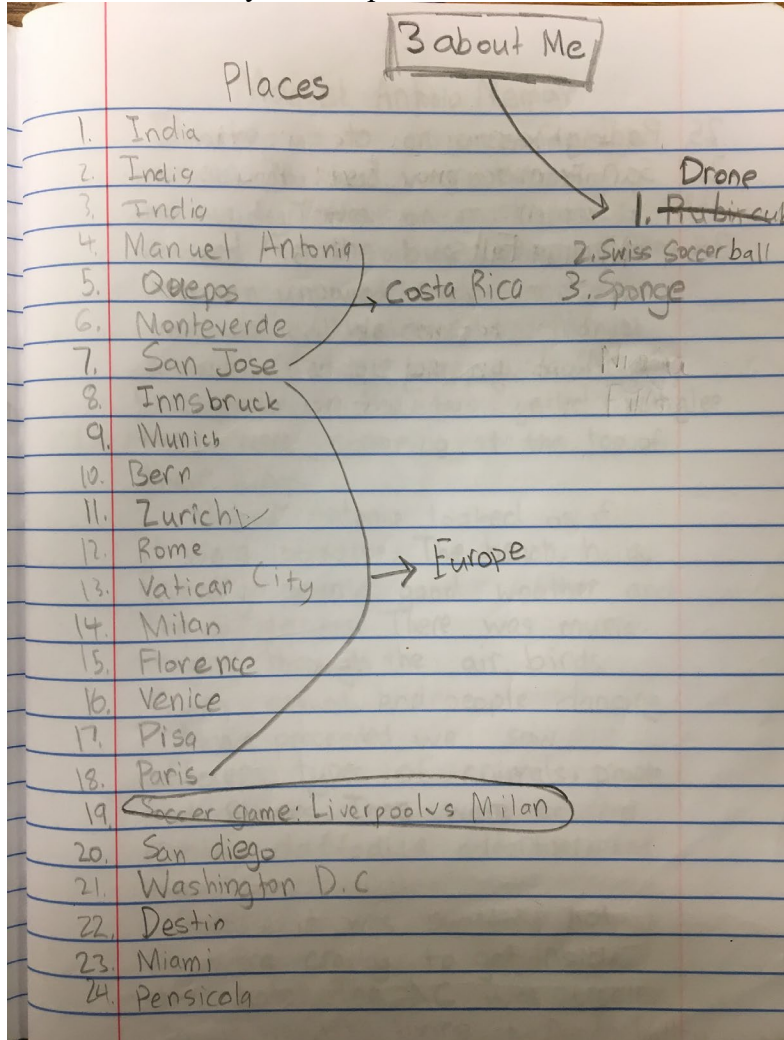
Teaching Strategies and Activities' Notes:

- “Days” are days of instruction, not necessarily consecutive days of teaching. Students spent time writing every day not only on days where there was a scheduled mini lesson. In addition there were also regular large blocks of time that were set aside for writing.
- Most of the writing consisted of prewriting (planning) and draft writing only, followed by subsequent student sharing with their classmates. For occasional pieces, the students utilized the full writing process of “prewriting, writing, revising, editing and publishing”.¹⁶
- On mini lessons days, there was the inclusion of teaching (a mini-lesson that sprung mostly from a mentor text), along with the modeling of the skill and strategy. The lessons tended to focus on an author’s technique with examples from the mentor text. On these mini lesson days, we also stopped after the lesson and had a short partner discussion (possible implementation ideas were discussed at this time). Once they discussed their ideas with their partners, the students then spent time either writing or revising a piece based on the ideas from the mini lesson.
- I introduced several “tools” that served as jumping off points for the students’ writing, and also as idea stimulators. These jumping off tools included: stained “glass” art, three-about-me bags, timelines, event lists and maps.
- We tried as much as possible to end our writing periods with a sharing session. Students read and discussed their passages with their classmates. These sharing sessions became “public forums to reinforce the strategies and skills taught in recent mini-lessons”.¹⁷

Lesson 1- Visual Memoir assignment

We started this unit by discussing the overall vision of the unit. The vision included using multiple tools to help the students brainstorm their writing ideas, the creation of lists, creating many writing pieces (moments or snippets), publishing a few of these, and then having a sharing celebration in conjunction with our student-led conferences.

I began by having them quickly make a list of any celebrations, vacations, special occasions and milestones they have experienced in their lives.



Once they made this list, we transitioned to our first “tool” - the creation of a visual moment. At this point I asked them to pick one of their experiences to focus on and one scene or memory from this experience that really stood out to them. Once they picked this “moment”, they were given the directions to create an artistic expression (Stained Art pictures) of one part of this event. Students were shown past students’ stained glass creations that were created in conjunction with the novel study of “Bud not Buddy”, by Christopher Paul Curtis. They followed these directions with their one scene or memory in mind:

1. Draw a simple scene on printer paper. Must be simple.
2. Cut out the objects from the scene and place onto black construction paper (or alternatively, put the printer paper on top of the black paper and trace over the scene on the printer paper with pressure. Fill in any missing areas on the black paper with pencil.)
3. Cut out the designs from the black construction paper. Do not cut black area separating the designs.
4. Glue various colors of tissue paper to the back side of the black paper designs

(Original directions [linked HERE](#))
([rubric for this linked here](#))

When the students were done with these “Stained Glass Pictures”, they had created a visual representation of their memory that had required them to zero in on one small part of the event or celebration. This activity forced the students to narrow down their focus which is important when students write their memoir moments or snippets. If this had not been done, especially when just beginning this unit, the students would have tried to write pages and pages about an event. I have seen them do this with other writing genres in the past, where they write stories that go on and on with so much detail and information that they slide into rambling. I also did not want them to slip into narrative writing and lose the whole point of retrospective reflection on their lives that is an important part of memoir.



Lesson 2

As a class, we watched the YouTube video, “What is Memoir (Shmoop)”. We discussed the difference between autobiography and memoir; autobiography being more factual and tending to try to tell the whole story -often spanning years and even decades, usually in chronological order. Memoir, as stated before is a moment of an event, looked at with reflection and new insight.

I then read to them the book “Owl Moon” by Jane Yolen, and discussed the characteristics of this type of writing (thoughts, feelings, sights, smells, remembrances from siblings). I read through this book once without stopping and then went back and read again, stopping at each page and discussing with the students how the writing is different from an autobiography or even a personal narrative.

After the discussion around the video clip and the picture book, the students were instructed to begin writing about the scene that they used for their stained glass art. They were to include important details and facts, as well as their feelings, the smells, the sounds, etc. I also stressed to them that they should include what they thought about during the event and why this event was important to them. Students began their writings in their writers’ notebook as a very rough draft.

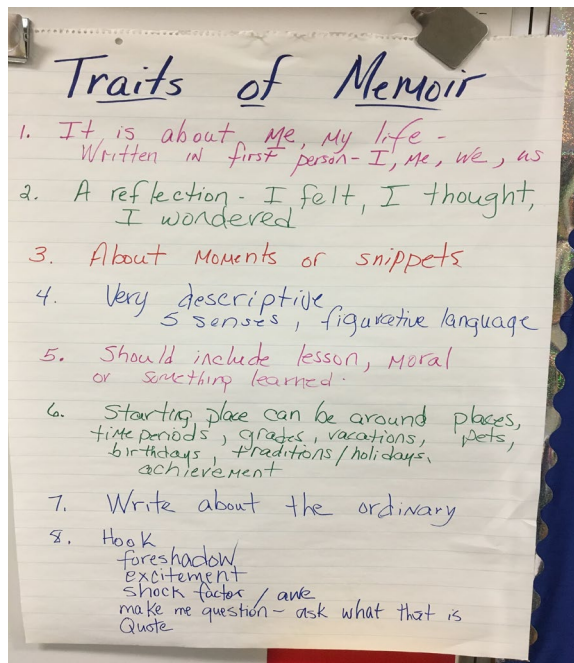
Since the art activity had forced them to pick a very small moment of this event, it was much easier to write about that small moment. When children began to veer away from the tiny moment, I asked questions, such as “Where do you show this (the veered off portion) in your picture?” The students would say it had occurred before or after, etc., and I would reiterate to them that it should not then be in this memoir moment.

When drafts were done, students shared with a group of one or two other students for feedback and enjoyment.

Lesson 3

On this day, the students and I began a list of “Traits of Memoir” on an anchor chart. The chart stayed in the front of the room and we added to it throughout the unit. The students used the chart as a reference as they worked on their different pieces. I also created a reflection rubric for them to use that mirrored this chart (see [“Assessment”](#) section).

Here is the FINAL anchor chart after all of our periodic additions:

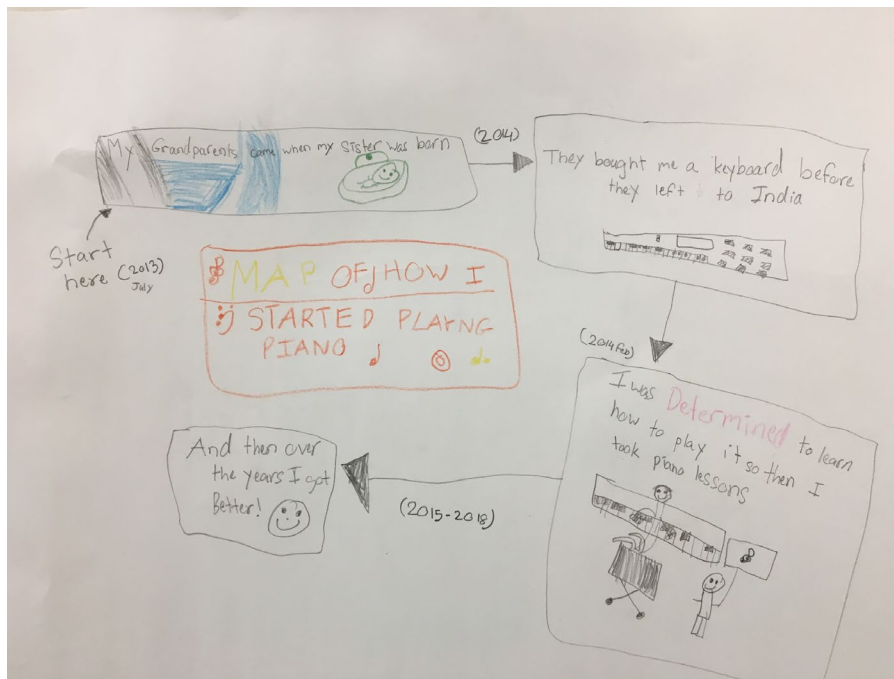


Also during lesson 3 we added our next tool: The “Three-About-Me bag”. This is a tool often used in the beginning of the school year to allow students to share important pieces of their lives with their classmates. A small paper bag was given to the students and they were asked to put three items from home into the bag that represented them, their interest and their lives. Students shared these with others in the class when they brought them back into school. These are perfect jumping off items for students to write about. For example if they bring in a soccer trophy, they could write about one scrimmage in one soccer game that they remember, reflecting on why it

was important to them and what they learned from that game. This was the focus of lesson three's writing piece.

Lesson 4

On our 4th day we took a break from writing to begin working on the students' next visual tool. I shared with the students Sara Fanelli's "My Map Book", which is a delightful picture book with maps drawn by the author of topics that you would not normally think of to map; topics such as your brain, your pet, your stomach. I instructed the students to decide on different topics for 5 maps that they were to draw. Once they decided on these topics, I gave them several days to do the actually work on the maps. Once the maps were complete, they were used as jumping off points to trigger memory moments to write about. For instance a map created by a student showed his progression from getting a keyboard as a gift from his grandparents, to actually taking piano lessons. He then latter wrote about that occasion and what has evolved from it. His map is shown here:



Lesson 5

During lesson five, we utilized several mentor texts to discuss opening "hooks" or lead-ins to the beginning of the text. We discussed how these hooks can include words which bring:

- excitement
- shock and awe
- an unfamiliar phrase or term that makes reader wonder, "What is that?"
- a quote
- a foreshadow, a foreboding

Example text & hook ideas I used (borrowed and adapted from Tara Gibney):

Mentor Text and Author	Hook	Type of Hook
“My Life in Dog Years” Gary Paulsen	<i>“For a time in my life I became a street kid.”</i>	Shock & Awe
“Knots in My Yo-yo String” Jerry Spinneli	<i>“Like much of my life until that sixteenth year, it was a sunny day.”</i>	Foreshadowing
“Homesick- My Own Story” Jean Fritz	<i>“Looking at her father’s globe ... I knew I was on the wrong side of the world.”</i> <i>“I always thought I would feel more American if I was named Marjorie.”</i>	A foreshadow What? Why?
“The Lost Garden” Laurence Yep	<i>“Like many other Chinese children of the time, I thought of myself as American.”</i>	What??
Boy! Tales of Childhood” Roald Dahl	<i>“The summer holidays! Those magic words!”</i>	Excitement

The students were told to look at some of their already constructed drafts and think of ways to insert a hook to capture their reader, to entice the reader to continue reading the story. For most students this was a hard skill to master and so children were paired up and allowed to brainstorm with their partner. Time was given for the hooks to be added to their previously written passage and then the students shared their new first paragraphs with the class.

Teacher note: The use of titles and hooks often presents a hurdle and blank stares from students - they find it really difficult. Let them leave the title and the hook/intro as the last thing that they add to their memoir moment. Often, waiting until the end of the piece, the title and hook actually become clearer.

Lesson 6

At this point in the unit, I made a purposeful turn toward emphasizing the multicultural in our conversations in class, aiming to have the students' writing reflect their family history. The students were given a set of [interview questions](#) to ask their parents so that they could explore their personal family heritage and values, as well as having ideas to help them reflect that heritage in their writing. Once they completed the parent interviews and brought these back into school, we discussed further how these were to be used.

I showed the students the TED talk, given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "*The Danger of a Single Story*". In this TED talk she discussed the necessity to move beyond the "one, single story" mentality.¹⁸ As a class we discussed some of her examples of how easy it is to look at someone and use their looks - their obvious ethnicity, disability, apparent status - to prejudge a person. For example, we assume that everyone of one particular race is the same in their socioeconomic status. We fail to allow each person to have their own story and their own unique personality. I discussed with the students how writing about pieces of our lives that are framed and influenced by our culture and family history, and then sharing those memoir moments, we open a door between the rest of the class and ourselves. The rest of the students can begin to appreciate not only the differences we have from one another, but also the many similarities.

([Interview questions](#) are in "Teaching resources" section)

Lesson 7

Finally with Lesson 7, we discussed how to bring the memoir pieces to a close. In Tara Gibney's great article, she discusses many ways to bring a passage to a close. In our class we adopted a couple of them and then added one of our own. The one that we added of our own was to end with the lesson learned, the moral of the moment spelled out. Since in our writings, I had emphasized the need to reflect and consider what the moment revealed - a self-reflection in the piece - this seemed a great way for many of the students to finalize and wrap up their memoir moment.

We also discussed and used Gibney's idea of a "summary ending", and although she refers to it as a one-liner summary, we chose to expand that to more than one sentence if necessary. For a mentor text I used Patricia Polacco's book, "*The Keeping Quilt*". In the beginning of this book a quilt is crafted from a collection of family clothes, and then throughout the book, the quilt's story is followed as it is passed from one daughter to another, giving it great family significance. The summary at the end that really tied the whole book together, said "Twenty years ago, I held Traci Denise in the quilt for the first time, someday she too will leave home, and she will take the quilt with her".¹⁹

A circular story is when the moment ends in a way that directly relates it to the beginning of the story. The passage that I shared with the students to illustrate this was from Gary Paulsen's book, "*My Life in Dog Years*". In the chapter entitled "Quincy", Paulsen begins with "He did not look like a dog that ought to be named White Fang..." He circles back around for the ending

and writes, “He should have been named White Fang”.²⁰ These three types of endings gave the students who struggled with the process of coming up with a natural ending to their piece, a model or format to utilize.

Lesson 8

The students were asked to choose three of their memoir moment pieces - one cultural piece, one moment written from their maps, and one memoir piece about an event.

Event	Cultural	Maps	
Winning the geobos	The Kurta	Drawing my brain	①
Snowboarding	1	Soccer game	②
Piano	2	Drones	
Pre-k			
Sleepover			
Rock climbing			
Parasail			

These three pieces were cleaned up and fine-tuned so the students could publish them on our class website. During this “clean up” process, the students helped each other check the focus (they asked, “How does this story tell us who you are?”). The student and their peer review partner were instructed to check their piece against our memoir chart and used the [self reflection checklist](#), making sure each trait of the memoir was included. For example, the “inclusion of all five senses”, they asked where and when did the author use each of these?

Finale -- Student-Led Conferences and Writers’ Showcase Celebration

The culmination of this unit was the sharing of the memoirs by the students during our end of quarter Student-Led Conferences. This was organized and orchestrated so that half of the class and their parents had their conferences before the Writers’ Showcase celebration and then the other half of the class held their conferences after the Showcase. This facilitated being able to fit

everyone into the two rooms we used without being so crowded that conversations were overheard. During the Writers' Showcase, which was held between the two sessions of conferences, each student read aloud to the parents and guests their selected memoirs. The result of this showcase – the students were proud, the parents were proud and this teacher was proud!

Great website resources for Student-Led Conferences are included in the Bibliography. A copy of the "What to expect" letter for parents, as well as all of the cheat sheets and mastery sheets that the students used for reference, is in the Teacher Resources section. Also there is the list of questions for parents to ask during the conference to facilitate conversation.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.A

Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.B

Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.C

Use a variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.D

Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.E

Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

Production and Distribution of Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.5

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.6

With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting.

Range of Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

NC Essential Arts Standards-Art

4.CX.2.2 Apply skills and concepts learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts, in the visual arts.

Students will connect their own life experiences through reading and writing and the arts.

Demonstrate how the arts are within other disciplines such as reading and writing, poetry and printmaking. Show the similarities in writing and creating art.

4.CX.2.4 Explain the effect of technology on the way products look and how they are created
Interpretation or reflection can be expressed as art and reading/writing

4.V.3.2 Compare characteristics of a variety of media.

4.V.3.3 Create art using the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, ceramics, and current technology.

North Carolina Essential Standards - Information and Technology Essential Standards

4.TT.1 Use technology tools and skills to reinforce classroom concepts and activities.

4.TT.1.2 Use a variety of technology tools to organize data and information (e.g., word processor, graphic organizer, audio and visual recording, online collaboration tools, etc.).

4.TT.1.3 Use technology tools to present data and information (multimedia, audio and visual recording, online collaboration tools, etc.).

Assessments

Artwork Rubric

Points	2	3	4	5
Elements of Design	Student did only minimum work	Satisfactory work but obvious lack of planning	Artwork shows effort and care	Unique creativity
Creativity	No evidence of original thought	Work lacks originality	Work demonstrates original ideas	Work has a unique, high level of originality
Effort	Work is not finished, or show very little effort	Work is finished but looks rushed or lacks 'finish'	Work is completed in an average manner, but more could have been done	Effort and care given beyond the requirements of the project
Skill	Work shows poor craftsmanship & lack of understanding	Average work and demonstration of understanding	Work shows above average craftsmanship & understanding	Work is outstanding and finished with care and detail
Total points				

Total possible points = 20. Use the total points x 5 to give the score out of 100





Self-Reflection - Memoir checklist

Traits of memoir	Self - reflection	Peer - assessment	Improvement areas?
Written about me in first person			
Includes my reflections			
Covers only a snippet or moment of time			
Includes a lesson, or a moral			
Includes all 5 senses; figurative language			
Written about the ordinary moments of life			
Contains a Hook (foreshadow, quote, excitement, shock factor, unknown)			
Ending is concise and wraps up the snippet.			

[\(return to Lesson 8\)](#)

Lucy Calkins - Illustrative Self/Peer Reflection writing rubric for grade 4

(Screenshot shown below; full rubric available at <https://bit.ly/shuman66>)

Narrative Writing Checklist					
Grade 4					
STRUCTURE					
Overall	I wrote the important part of an event bit by bit and took out unimportant parts.				
	Did I do it like a fourth grader?	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES	
Lead		I wrote a beginning in which I showed what was happening and where, getting readers into the world of the story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitions	<p>Just then, Suddenly,</p>  <p>After a while, A little later,</p> 	I showed how much time went by with words and phrases that mark time such as <i>just then</i> and <i>suddenly</i> (to show when things happened quickly) or <i>after a while</i> and <i>a little later</i> (to show when a little time passed).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		I wrote an ending that	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Materials for Classroom Use

Memoir timeline prompts and idea starters

Think of the following topics and questions and add these to your timelines.

- Where you were born. What do you know about that day?
- Why were you given the name (first and middle) that you have?
- What is the earliest memory you have from when you were little?
- Other important births (siblings, cousins, neighbors...)
- What other places and houses have you lived in? Who lives with you?
- What cultural or religious traditions does your family follow?
- What is your favorite holiday and why?
- Do you have pets - present and past?
- Favorite food you eat with your family? Least favorite food?
- What is the best part of your day? The worst?
- What is the best part of the week? The worst?
- Deaths of loved ones? Other tragedies
- Biggest disappointment?
- Your favorite clothing articles?
- Any major historical events you have lived through?
- A time you lied, stole or got in trouble for something big?
- The scariest time you can remember...
- The most embarrassing thing you remember.
- Best birthday celebration
- Different schools...
- Sporting events you saw or participated in..
- Adventures
- Places you visited
- Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Godparents
- What do you do during summer break?

Stained Art Scenery

Use colored tissue paper and black construction paper to recreate a scene from the book. When finished and placed in the window, the paper has the same effect as stained glass.

Materials

- colored tissue paper
- black construction paper
- glue sticks
- pencils
- scissors
- drawing paper

Directions

1. Draw a simple design of a scene from *Bud, Not Buddy* on a piece of drawing paper. Do not overlap any of the objects in the scene. The designs need to be very simple. Next, cut out the simple designs.
2. Take the designs and objects cut from the scene, and place them onto the black construction paper. Trace around the outline.
3. Now, carefully cut out the designs from the black construction paper. Be careful not to cut the black area separating the designs.
4. Select the colors of tissue paper that you would like to work with. Remember to use a variety of colors.
5. Flip the construction paper so that it is on the back side. Place glue around each design and carefully paste down the tissue paper. Each piece and each color should be glued down individually.
6. When completed, the stained-glass art can then be placed on the window glass for display.



Now write a poem to accompany your scene. Fill in the lines of the diamonte poem below, describing the stained-glass scene you have just made.

title of stained art scenery (1 word)

description of scene (2 words)

action about the scene (3 words)

feeling about the scene (4 words)

synonym for the title (1 word)

Interview Questions for Parents

1. How did your family come to live here (Charlotte / USA)? Where were other family members in the area? Who?
2. If you or your parents/grandparents came here from another country, where did they come from and why did you come to the USA?
3. How do you define “family”? Who makes up your family?
4. Who holds the most “status” in your family? Why?
5. How do you define success?
6. How important is education in your family?
7. What is the most important meal of the day? Of the week?
8. Do you eat foods that are indigenous to your culture, or to your family heritage? Why or why not? What are some of the foods that you eat?
9. Describe a typical family dinner. Growing up, did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? Do you have any eating habits or rituals that are specific to your culture (native country or religion)?
10. Did you ever live with your grandparents, parents or extended family?
11. Do you actively participate in an organized religion? How important is religion in your family?
12. Do you celebrate any religious holidays or seasons? What is the most important and celebrated holiday of your culture?
13. If you are from a culture that speaks English as a second language, do you speak your native language? Do you speak this in the home currently and do your children know this language?
14. What is considered most respectful to you, most disrespectful?
15. Have you ever experienced racism or prejudice, and if so, in what manner?
16. What are the best and worst things about living in the USA?

[\(return to Lesson 6\)](#)

Resources for Students

Some examples of memoir books for students include:

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst
Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson
El Deafo by Cece Bell
In My Momma's Kitchen by Jerdine Nolen
Owl Moon by Jane Yolen
Thunder Cake by Patricia Polacco
The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco
When Lightning Comes in a Jar by Patricia Polacco
Knots in my Yo-Yo String by Jerry Spinelli
Childtimes by Eloise Greenfield & Lessie Jones Little
The Lost Garden by Laurence Yep
Homesick, My Own Story by Jean Fritz
My Life in Dog Years by Gary Paulsen
Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl

Resources for Teachers

Letter to send home to parents before conferences:

<https://bit.ly/shuman67>

Questions for parent to ask child during the conference

<https://bit.ly/shuman70>

Student Self- Evaluation form for Student Led conferences “Rate Yourself”

<https://bit.ly/shuman69>

Student script and guide

<https://bit.ly/shuman68>

Mastery Inventories (Math is listed here, but similar sheet was given for Literacy & Science)

<https://bit.ly/shuman71>

Student led conferences resources:

<http://honorsgradu.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/GuidingQuestionsforStudent-LedConferences.pdf>

http://www.idcs.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_247635/File/WebPDFs/SLCform%20for%20parents.pdf

<https://backend.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/resources/edutopia-wildwood-world-magnet-student-led-conference-question-sheet.pdf>

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/student-led-conferences-resources-ashley-cronin>

A Guide for Using Bud, Not Buddy in the Classroom. Teacher Created Resources.

ISBN: 9781420624526 . I used "Stained Art Scenery" p.21

Fanelli, Sara. My Map Book. copyright 1995 by Sara Fanelli . HarperCollins and haperfestival

YouTube video , “What is Memoir (Shmoop)”

https://youtu.be/PLHkuSpJxPs?list=PLBmnOG37gEEKQCiGquL_y3jCWgW1gq3sJ

Bibliography for Teachers

Adichie, C. "The Danger of a Single Story". October 7, 2009, Accessed September 18, 2018.

<https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg>

One of the foundational resources for this unit that discusses judgments based on preconceived notions.

Bomer, Katherine. Why Teach Memoir? Reasons that will Change your Teaching and your Life. In *Writing a Life: Teaching Memoir to Sharpen Insight, Shape Meaning and Triumph over Tests* by Katherine Bomer, 1-25. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005.

Great overall article on teaching memoir in the classroom

Calkins, Lucy, Kelly Boland. Hohne, and Audra Kirshbaum. Robb. *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades K-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2015.

Discussion of the writers' workshop model and the progression from idea through publishing of students' writing.

Calkins, Lucy. A Curricular Plan for the Writing Workshop, Grade 5, 2011-2012. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2011. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cabarrus.k12.nc.us/cms/lib07/NC01910456/Centricity/domain/520/curriculum/ela/5th/unit1writing/TC5thWUnit1Memoir.pdf>.

Specific unit on teaching memoir in the classroom.

Gibney, Tara. "Teaching Memoir in the Elementary School Classroom. A Genre Study Approach." *The Reading Teacher* 66, no. 3 (November 2012): 243-53.

doi:10.1002/TRTR.01108.

Well laid out discourse from someone who actually went through the whole process with students. This article was borrowed from heavily.

Gold, Jonathan. The Danger of a Single Story. (September 2015) Retrieved from:

https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/the-danger-of-a-single-story_Commentary on Adichie's Ted talk

Graham, Greg. "Bringing Students to Life with Memoir Writing". Education Week-Teacher. 2013. Accessed September 12, 2018.

https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2013/01/29/fp_graham_memoir.html

Motivation for teachers to actually teach writing in their classrooms

Growth Mindset. The Glossary of Education Reform. Accessed September 18, 2018 from:

<https://www.edglossary.org/growth-mindset/>

Definition of growth mindset as attributed to Carol Dweck.

Khan Academy. How to Grow your Brain. Accessed September 18, 2018.

<https://youtu.be/GWSZ1DKjNzY>.

Awesome explanation of frustration and confusion leading to growth of neurons in brain, with perseverance. Used when discussing Growth Mindset.

Martin, C. "Tips for Parents: writing and the Gifted Child". 2005, Accessed July 14, 2018.

<http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10376>

This article gives tips for parents on how to help their children develop necessary writing skills.

Paulsen, Gary. My Life in Dog Years. New York: Yearling, Random House, 1999.

Used as a mentor text to show link between opening "hook" statements and the ending of a story.

Polacco, Patricia. The Keeping Quilt. New York, Simon and Schuster Books, 1988.

Great book to use as a memoir text. We used it specifically for a model of how to end a story.

Notes

- ¹ Adichie, C. "The Danger of a Single Story". October 7, 2009, Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg>
- ² Gibney, Tara. "Teaching Memoir in the Elementary School Classroom. A Genre Study Approach." *The Reading Teacher* 66, no. 3 (November 2012): 243-53.
- ³ Boomer, K. "Why Teach Memoir? Reasons that will Change your Teaching and your Life." In *Writing a Life: Teaching Memoir to Sharpen Insight, Shape Meaning and Triumph over Tests*
- ⁴ Graham, G. "Bringing Students to Life with Memoir Writing". *Education Week-Teacher*. 2013.
- ⁵ See ³ above
- ⁶ Calkins, Lucy. "A Curricular Plan for the Writing Workshop, Grade 5, 2011-2012". Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2011
- ⁷ See ⁶ above
- ⁸ Martin, C. "Tips for Parents: Writing and the Gifted Child". 2005, Accessed July 14, 2018. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10376>
- ⁹ See ⁸ above
- ¹⁰ Growth Mindset. The Glossary of Education Reform. Accessed September 18, 2018 from: <https://www.edglossary.org/growth-mindset/>
- ¹¹ Khan academy. "How to Grow your Brain". Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://youtu.be/GWSZ1DKjNzY>
- ¹² See ¹ above
- ¹³ See ¹ above
- ¹⁴ Gold, Jonathan . "The Danger of a Single Story". (September 2015) Retrieved from: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/the-danger-of-a-single-story>
- ¹⁵ see ² above
- ¹⁶ Calkins, et all. *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades K-8*. Portsmouth, NH:

¹⁷ See ² above

¹⁸ See ¹ above

¹⁹ Polacco, P. "The Keeping Quilt". New York, Simon and Schuster Books, 1988.

²⁰ Paulson, G. "My Life in Dog Years". New York: Yearling, Random House, 1999