



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2010 Volume III: Creating Lives: An Introduction to Biography

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## **Connecting to Community: Biography and the Digital Age**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.03.12, published September 2010  
by Dean Whitbeck

This semester-long unit plan is divided into four modules (*Writing, Oral, Digital, Portfolio*) and is intended to teach biography as a form of literature and as way for students to explore stories in the their own family and community. The unit is directed toward high school students who live in a culture of inner-city poverty, but because environmental trauma and the pain of adolescence has no boundaries, the unit can be adapted according to grade level and learning environment. The extended study of biography offers students the opportunity to explore what it means to tell another's story and the empowerment that comes from offering that story to world. Students will read Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *MAUS* – a biographical account of his parents' experiences as Jews in concentration camps during the Holocaust. The hope is that in reading *MAUS* students can begin to dissociate from the trauma of their own community and become aware that telling another's story can validate their own narratives that are often never told.

The unit of biography also focuses on bringing twenty-first century technology into the art of storytelling. Students will create digitized oral and visual biographies that will be archived. The process of creating digital stories not only develops new literacy skills, it engages students in both a visual and aural experience. The final module of the unit is a portfolio in which students will present their work to the public for assessment and affirmation.

(Developed for Introduction to Literature, grade 10, and Creative Writing, grade 12; recommended for Literature Courses, Middle School grades)

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