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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2013 Volume III: John L. Gaddis, Professor of History

Understanding Character Development Through the Use of Autobiography

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by Taylor Davis

In this unit students will focus on mastering the skill of characterization through the study of the genre of autobiography. The objectives of the unit include understanding the genre of autobiography not only as the story of a person's life, but also as a portrait of a person's character, identifying evidence within a text that can be used to infer a character trait, and writing short student autobiographies with a focus on incorporating writing techniques that can be used to reveal character. The primary mentor text for the unit is an autobiography by the award-winning children's author Roald Dahl entitled *Boy: Tales of Childhood*.

The unit of study is intended for middle school students and can be adapted for grades six through eight. A variety of resources and approaches to teaching characterization will be used in the unit including visual aids, such as pictures and graphic organizers. Throughout the course of the unit, students will be asked to connect with the text by drawing from their own experiences of childhood, considering the development of their own internal character, and determining how it can best be shown to someone else.

(Developed for English/Language Arts, grade 8; recommended for English/Language Arts, grades 6-8)

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