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Reading, Writing, and Recidivism: Healing to Learn through Memoir and Vignette for Adjudicated and/or Traumatized Youth

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I and the public know
What all school children learn
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return. W.H. Auden
There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside
you. Zora Neale Hurston

Introduction

In the last few months, several of my former high school students have made the news: one was fatally shot in a local gang altercation; another was arrested for two armed robberies; the third made national news for his shootout on the courthouse steps. I have spent most of the last decade of my teaching career in alternative schools which specialize in working with students who are considered at-risk because they have not been academically or socially successful, or both, in their home schools. The behaviors and circumstances that prevent their success range from chronic absences, poverty, and parenthood to substance abuse and criminal behaviors. This coming year, though, will be my first year teaching students who are almost exclusively at school to meet a parole requirement. Criminality is their commonality.

What journey does a seventeen-year-old take to get to this place? Almost always, the journey involves trauma, whether a single debilitating event or a chronic history of it. It may have been a natural disaster—I've taught several refugees from Hurricane Katrina—or abuse, whether verbal, physical, or sexual. It turns out that the courthouse shooter's brother had been fatally shot by police in an altercation that developed when they were questioning him about someone else. This had happened a few months before he showed up in my classroom, and the effects of his grief in his behavior were already apparent. Two of my students, having met several years before at a camp for children of parents in prison, became reacquainted in my classroom, dated for a year, and together parented a child who died within a few months after suffocating while sleeping in their bed. Trauma on top of trauma.

I set out to find out how this trauma manifested itself in my classroom, and, as an English teacher, what I could do about it. I found clear connections among recidivism, past traumatic experience, and literacy deficits. The next step was to find out how I might address the effects of these connections. I discovered that a course

of writing therapy coupled with literary instruction could be an antidote. I propose that, in classrooms with any significant number of at-risk students, therapeutic writing be a prescribed practice, especially paired with sound reading instruction. It will be in mine. In fact, Jeffrey Berman says, "It may be far riskier not to allow our students to write about their fears and conflicts." ¹

By Marian MacCurdy's definition, trauma is an event or situation so overwhelming that we cannot process it because it does not fit into our existing cognitive grid of experience and emotion. ² Clearly, trauma exists in the lives of many young people from infants to college students. As teachers, this matters to us because the existence of trauma inhibits the ability to process, maintain, and use academic learning. Intuitively, as teachers we know this, but research also consistently indicates that stresses after disasters (and other traumatic events) in the lives of adolescents "can be manifested in poor decisions, risky behaviors, distrust of adults, violent outbursts and/or withdrawal." ³ All of these symptoms have been present in my classroom. For example, these "poor decisions" have come in the form of substance abuse and avoidance of birth control, both of which can lead to a chain of difficult decisions and far-reaching consequences, like addiction, unplanned parenthood, or abortion. Post-Katrina, teachers in New Orleans reported "an intellectual passivity, difficulty with maintaining in-depth study, a numbness to learning, difficulty with acquiring information, prone to argument and more physical violence, and a need for more personal affirmation and hope." ⁴ These symptoms persist in my classroom and others like mine, even when morale among students is generally good and the setting is welcoming.

These destructive behaviors are commonly accompanied by another trait: lagging academic achievement. So while traumatic experiences influence academic performance, conversely, Katsiyannis and his team explain that there is a direct correlation between low academic performance and incarceration and recidivism rates. ⁵ In fact, according to Rogers-Adkinson's team, the lack of functional literacy is perhaps the strongest common denominator among individuals in corrections." ⁶ 85% of adjudicated youth in the cited study performed at lower rates academically than their non-offending peers. This unit will encourage healing writing practices while teaching specific English Language Arts objectives intended to increase literacy and writing skills.

It should be noted that many contemporary high schools, especially in high-poverty or inner city situations, encounter similar students; they just do not have criminal records or have not found their way into concentrated groups or alternative education environments. All or parts of this unit would be appropriate for any students facing these realities.

Rationale

The English/language arts curriculum and classroom experience are ideally suited to addressing in the school environment the effects of the tightly braided cause-and-effect relationships among traumatic experience, academic deficiency, and recidivism. "Evidence...suggests that the effects of disasters and violence on adolescents can produce long-term debilitating mental effects directly related to language use, literacy practices and cognition." ⁷ If classroom teachers can begin to address these problems and teach content specific objectives in the process, then certainly we should.

Works by MacCurdy and James Pennebaker make clear the connections between trauma and the writing

process as a means of healing. Most memories that we accrue over the course of a day fit into an existing schema with cumulative, collective meaning. Many bits of data are released and even forgotten because they are not necessary for meaning. Traumatic memories are imagistic. We remember pictures and sensory experiences because they are too overwhelming to fit into the existing schema. These kinds of memories are called iconic, and while they do not fit into the existing schema of memory, they do attach to specific emotions that a victim experiences, even if he/she does not understand the cause or meaning. Adrenaline surges of a fight-or-flight response help to imprint these sensory images, ensuring that we'll remember the danger if we encounter it again in the future.

"Re-examining sensory details encoded during extreme life moments is at the core of trauma recovery." ⁸ Writing becomes the perfect tool for pulling the images together while re-inserting narrative to reconstruct meaning, the first step to healing. Edna Fox, a clinical psychologist, had female rape victims rewrite their narratives over and over in detail. Subsequent retellings showed increasingly reduced symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. ⁹ While sitting on the lawn at Yale during the National Institute, Deborah Alvarez, who has researched post-Katrina classrooms extensively, told me impassioned stories about how these post-hurricane classrooms saw alleviation of stresses and improved cognitive development after teachers implemented healing writing practices.

Objectives

The summative product/outcome will be, for each student, a bound copy of his/her vignettes (five-ten) that reflect growth in all stages of the writing process, from brainstorming to final editing, as well as an understanding and appreciation of the genres of vignette and memoir. Along the way, students will familiarize themselves and become adept at using all stages of the writing process, from pre-writing (in the form of journals and other selective prompts) to mechanical editing. They will have read and studied multiple examples of vignettes and memoir and learned from the process of emulation and analysis, thereby increasing skills in reading and writing and addressing the risk of recidivism through academic and literacy empowerment.

As a result of purposeful therapeutic writing practices, our first anticipated non-cognitive outcome is to keep students from re-offending. The second is improved psychological and physiological health for students in a classroom setting that is noticeably relieved of the manifestations of "poor decisions, risky behaviors, distrust of adults, violent outbursts and/or withdrawal" I mentioned above. Finally, as I encourage students to look into the stories and cultural influences in their lives, they should improve their ability to understand how these influences have shaped who they are.

Context

School Background

My school, which meets a primary parole requirement, was created to serve adjudicated youth. Next year we will have five teachers and two social workers for sixty students. Our first goal is to keep students from re-offending, but we still strive to cover all the state and federally mandated objectives we can. Because this will be my first year at this site, I have spent time with other faculty and the social work staff to gain some background on the students as well as the particular strengths and challenges that go along with this student body. Faculty spend a great deal of time each day helping students deal with issues that have come with them from outside school. For example, while visiting on a typical day last year, I observed that one student arrived intoxicated and another had not been home—or to sleep—before he showed up at school. Students were concerned that their routines were going to be altered because of state testing and were struggling with the changes to the schedule. Thus, the first two hours became adjustment time; a few students went off to decompress with social workers; others went on to their advisories to start individual projects. Throughout the day, the importance of relationships among those in the school became increasingly apparent. At our site, the students' experience is enhanced with group and individual counseling with social work staff. Because of the potentially sensitive nature of this unit, we will first have to spend time building relationships among students and teacher (me).

Big Picture Learning

The school is a Big Picture Learning school. ¹⁰ The Big Picture model was created in 1995 by Dennis Littke and Elliot Washor to add authenticity and real-world experience for students who have found that traditional high schools do not work for them. Students' education plans are highly individualized based on interests, needs, and arts (at our site) or internship opportunities outside of the school. Big Picture Learning is built on a three-part philosophy. The first of these is relationship-building. Students' learning is weakened in situations in which students do not feel safe or comfortable; conversely, students' learning is enhanced in environments where they do. Consequently, each class, called an advisory, spends significant time, especially early in the year, building its own culture of family, stability, and trust. Outside of content area instruction, advisory is the home base and relationship core for students; advisors are responsible for not only a student's instruction, but also for his/her emotional well-being. The second is relevance; reluctant students are more inclined to strive for academic success when they see its relevance to their lives, needs, and personal interests. The third is rigor, based on the idea that especially with at-risk students, rigor is more readily achieved after relevance and relationships are established.

The class spends most days with their advisor who should be immediately responsive to the needs of both group and individuals. Rather than taking final exams, Big Picture students present an exhibition to their learning team (parents/guardians, advisor, and other invited guests) at the end of each quarter. They present what they've learned and how they've learned it, through demonstration, teaching, and visual aids. Each exhibition reflects that student's individual growth and reflection and can be a powerful learning tool in itself. Most Big Picture schools emphasize preparing at-risk students for the college experience; again, while a few of ours may eventually go that direction, our first goal is preventing recidivism.

Academic Context

While a great deal of each student's curriculum plan is individualized, the school places a priority on literacy development, and each advisory will take an English class with me three times a week. This unit is for use during their English/language arts class. They will almost always be reading a book, whether fiction or non-fiction, in addition to experiencing other ELA units like this one.

Student Body

The students tend to be older (16-21, not 14-18) and significantly behind in credits. In terms of academic achievement, they mirror the subjects in the articles I read on incarcerated or delinquent youth by being several grade levels behind their non-offending peers. Last year there were 22 students consistently enrolled; 36 were served over the course of the year. They had an average suspension and/or expulsion rate of nine each. Six students were diagnosed with serious mental health disorders and are on medication. Approximately fifteen students dealt with substance abuse issues. Near 100 percent were victims of poverty and trauma, whether chronic or singularly devastating. Often these students have destructive behaviors such as substance abuse and poor sleep and nutrition habits.

Many also face the problems that go along with being a minority in a very segregated city. Approximately 1/3 are Caucasian, 1/3 African American, and 1/3 Native American or a mix of any two of the three. Tulsa's racial history is worth mentioning; race riots in 1921 in which much of the black part of town, known then because of its economic success as Black Wall Street, was destroyed by white Tulsans. Many shadows and questions linger, and the city is one of the most divided—geographically, culturally, and socio-politically—in the country. Skepticism and mistrust often pervade the relationships among educators, families, and communities.

All of these conditions have significant negative influences on the quality and quantity of learning. Classes are multi-grade and multi-ability. For most of these students, who have full time jobs, children, or generally difficult existences, school has no apparent, immediate relevance. Interventions for behavioral problems or social service appointments will interrupt the unit flow for some students, but our flexible schedule allows for accommodations.

Philosophy

Students do not read or write in a vacuum. The more they read, the more they become aware of the craft in the writing of others. Sentence structures and prose forms become more familiar, and eventually they influence students' own writing, either consciously or subconsciously. It works the other way, as well. As they become purposeful writers, they appreciate and understand the intentions of other writers. This improves comprehension and appreciation as they read. This unit capitalizes on those connections by encouraging students to see those relationships in their reading and writing activities.

The vicarious experience of reading also gives students insight and wisdom that adds a layer of dimension and reflection to their writing.

Objective feedback in the form of rubrics and peer review are essential to this philosophy. Good rubrics help writers focus their attention on specific objectives and may prevent them from being overwhelmed by the

process. Young writers learn not just from accomplished, published writers, but also from the strengths and weaknesses of those who write like more like themselves.

The Unit

The unit will take place over one quarter, specifically the third, though our journal writing will have begun at the first of the year. We will follow two tracks, one reading and one writing; the two will converge in the creation of the collection of vignettes towards the end of the quarter.

The unit also replaces a common Big Picture long-term assessment that is usually in the form of a lengthy autobiography (up to 75 pages). The purpose of this autobiography is to encourage introspection and self-awareness in the writer, as well as to instill a sense of accomplishment from completing such a hefty piece of writing. By the time students are nearing the end of the Big Picture education, they should have developed an understanding of how they've changed, how and what they have learned, and what they can do to control their futures. They should be able to articulate these things in their autobiographies. The assignment is not appropriate for my students, who sometimes don't remain with us all year and are intimidated by such an undertaking—a risk I cannot afford to take, as their relationship to school is already so tenuous. At-risk students tend to respond with more enthusiasm to smaller nuggets of acquired information, practice and assessment. I do, however, want to encourage students to explore who they are and the factors that have contributed to their perceptions of self. Hence, rather than a lengthy, sustained piece writing, we will accomplish some of the same goals with our collections of vignettes.

Text Selection

My text selection is partly influenced by readings and inspired discussion in my "Storytelling" seminar at the 2012 National Initiative, but also by recommendations by Diana Rogers-Adkinson and her team.¹¹ They give four key criteria for text selection for use in the reading instruction of delinquent youth. First, it should be culturally sensitive to and reflective of the students; second, the content should be meaningful to their environments and home lives; third, the content should be readily engaging; and fourth, texts should be inclusive and respectful, avoiding middle class success stories and representing instead the "limits of resources of students and families within the curriculum, varying models of family systems."¹² Selections are all vignettes or excerpts of memoirs.

The first selection is the essay "Salvation" by Langston Hughes. In it he relays a boyhood religious conflict that culminates in a painful family situation and long-term religious doubts. The family situation, language, and setting are familiar to many of my students. Richard Wright's autobiographical story/memoir *Black Boy* will be represented in excerpts, chosen for their representations of poverty and personal conflicts. I will present Chapter Six of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: a Survivor's Tale, I: My Father Bleeds History* as a vignette. Though an incomplete plot arc, it nevertheless is full of intense emotion. I anticipate that the genre of graphic novel will be appealing to students and may provide creative options for our final vignette collections. Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is another selection that is autobiographical in nature and full of young men's difficult choices, engaging stories, and vivid imagery. It is a collection of short fiction and vignette that meld to become a full length novel. I will use vignettes from the selection. In the past, I've had tremendous success with this text and at-risk students.

The central piece of literature for the unit, though, is *The House on Mango Street*, a collection of vignettes by Sandra Cisneros. It is especially rich in cultural imagery; also, vignettes, by their brevity, will be non-threatening to my students as they begin to create their own. The imagistic style of *The House on Mango Street* is suited for writings developed out of trauma writings, should some students feel comfortable to use them. Additionally, it represents our community's Hispanic population, which should be more present in our student body next year.

All of these selections are short or divisible to accommodate shorter attention spans that are inherent to most of my student population. The difficult conflicts and situations in each are well within the reality of my students. Through these works, students will also witness adverse situations that may be novel to them. This vicarious experience will expose them to how others cope with their traumas or perpetuate them in their own lives or by passing them on to the next generation.

Reading Strategies

We will study these texts for genre conventions, structure, the use of imagery, and style, as appropriate to the students on hand and anticipated outcome. Rogers-Adkinson's team specifically recommend guided oral reading strategies that emphasize repetition and a variety of commonly used comprehension enhancing activities.¹³ Most passages we will read aloud using several strategies, including reading aloud in unison with a student partner or me, then reading alone. Other strategies will include close readings followed by a variety of formative assessments, such as discussion, graphic organizers, dialectical-styled responses, and emulative written responses.

Timeline

In the first half of the quarter, we will explore all works except for *The House on Mango Street*. That will take the last four weeks and will be our focus as students begin drafting their own vignettes.

After reading excerpts from *Black Boy*, we will do a Problematic Situations activity to encourage connections between life and text. We'll look at a problematic situation. For example: You have the opportunity to make the lives of yourself and your family significantly better, but to do so you must steal from your boss. He'll never notice, and you're feeling pressure from others, who say, "No one will notice—just do it." The response can be in the form of small group or large group discussion (i.e. fishbowl, or peer-graded). In similar formats or in cause-effect organizers we can also look at anti-social behaviors in the text—their sources and relationships to high drop-out rates in contemporary youth/schools. This may lead some of them to possible topics in their own lives.

In "Salvation" we'll look at emotion words and concrete language, perhaps in dialectical format. Emotion words would go in the left column and associated images and impressions would go on the right. As an analysis exercise, students will select key images, sentence, and phrases and then reduce the autobiographical essay into a vignette, more brief and concrete. In reverse, this could also be a pre-writing activity for an original work, with the list of emotions the student wants to include alongside their appropriate imagery and concrete language.

Again, in *The Things They Carried*, the students will look for language that is concrete and realistic. This time we will pay more attention to setting and the words that connect it to theme and specific emotions. We will work through our discoveries in class discussion.

Finally, we'll spend more considerable time with the text of *The House on Mango Street*. We will study the genre of vignette reinforced with other examples (as yet to be determined). MacCurdy suggests that anchoring emotions with place and things helps to isolate them; we can also look at writing samples for examples of this. This can be done with simple graphic organizers. Such connections could be cemented for the student with simple illustrations/images. Working towards Common Core objectives, they will also discuss (at least) and/or write (at best) efforts at analysis for author's purpose and effect.

Writing Strategies

Writing is the essence of this unit, and the primary method of cracking the trauma that hinders the quality of learning in my classroom. We will begin the year with a practice of regular journaling. At the beginning of the third quarter, we will begin our practice of healing writing as prescribed by Pennebaker, Alvarez, and MacCurdy. Eventually, we will start selecting pieces from these writings to become their individual selections of vignettes.

Timeline

From the beginning of the year, students will freewrite early in the day, every day, to clear their minds of whatever pollution they may be bringing with them to school. These will go into a secure location where no one will see, read, or critique them unless a student particularly asks otherwise. At the end of the second quarter or the beginning of the third (but not before I sense students are ready), I will prompt students to write about a traumatic event in their lives. We will do this for four consecutive days over the same event. Again, these will be secure and without critique. Three weeks into this practice, I will assign more specific prompts about events (now avoiding traumatic situations) about other events and influences in their lives. At approximately week five, we will select writings they want to further develop or alter into vignettes. They may go back and add new pieces about traumatic events they chose to freewrite about earlier in the quarter. We will devote the remaining weeks to drafting, revising, sharing feedback, and editing for production.

Journaling

Unless I assign a journal prompt in response to a specific issue, lesson, or other event, we will freewrite every day my students are in my room, at least three days a week—regularly and frequently. I define freewriting as uninterrupted, unedited, fairly non-stop writing. For first five, then ten, and later fifteen minutes, they will freewrite. Their writings will go into a lockbox or the shredder—their choice. The exception to this will be journals that they do want me to read, in which case, they'll make a note at the top and leave it in my desk. No one else will read these journals. The purpose here is to let the writer feel totally uninhibited, which will be necessary when we arrive at the third quarter. This is also good writing practice; our ideas are more fully developed when our brains are not distracted by word choices, spelling, phrasing, or other problems. It is okay to write, "I don't know what to write" until a new line of thought arrives.

At the beginning of the third quarter, we will begin our therapeutic writing practice. There are specific prescriptions for this. To receive therapeutic release, writers must address emotional topics, not innocuous ones. Teachers should not give feedback. Instead, students can put their writings into an inauspicious box or throw them away—this could be a symbolic exercise in itself. (We will have already established these policies by the third quarter.) Traumatic narratives should be retold in four sessions of 15-30 minutes each, either every day for three to five days, or once a week for four weeks (Pennebaker 164). Writing in present tense encourages immediacy in the writer's memory; it can be revised later if the writing is going to be used for another purpose. ¹⁴ While feedback is generally forbidden, it may be acceptable after later re-writings, with

the permission of the writer. If and as trauma narratives are selected for revision, their release and use will be controlled by the writer.

Vignettes

A vignette is a short written sketch that highlights a person, object, setting, or situation, and often is not plot driven. All of the activities above will converge as students create their own writings in the learned style of memoir in the manner of vignette. If the writer desires, some may be based on trauma-inspired writings. As we near the completion of our reading selections, some writings will emulate reading selections, especially during the genre study of *Mango Street*. Other in-class prompts will be assigned with the intention of sharing with the group. The genre of vignette is appropriate for several reasons. First, writing for trauma victims is image-based, and vignette is an image-laden form. ¹⁵

When students have a selection of five-ten writings (from journals and other prompts and practice writings) that will become vignettes to work with, we'll replace our journaling and literary response activities with more structured, or deep, revision exercises. Selection of writings will be discretionary by the student; no one should be made uncomfortable by having selections—trauma-based or not—chosen for them. Peers and I may influence choices based on other qualities. As the group dynamic allows, we will spend time modeling and practicing carefully structured peer reviews with user-friendly rubrics designed for specific stages of revision. We will share final editing responsibilities, which may be reinforced by mini-lessons in punctuation or convention as needed. Our district print shop will "bind" their polished collections. In my experience with at-risk students, they are very motivated by the idea of a professional looking volume that they created. After seeing examples of previous similar projects, the reluctant learners in my book group at school last year wrote and revised gothic-inspired stories for weeks in anticipation of taking home their finished product after it had a color cover and professional publishing polish.

Conclusion

In the classroom, teachers carry emotional and academic stress for each of their students. The stress teachers absorb while working with students with histories of trauma and adjudication could be emotionally crushing at times. We should always keep in mind that we control the atmosphere in our classrooms, and that laughter is essential in keeping our students—and us—sane and in preserving a learning environment that is welcoming and productive. Therefore I'd like to end with an anecdote I encountered during my research and that gave me a great laugh. Marian MacCurdy relates a story about the wife of Thomas Hardy. While having tea, a friend asked Mrs. Hardy if her husband's writing was going well. She responded, "I'm sure of it. I could hear him sobbing all afternoon." ¹⁶

Classroom Activities

First Activity: Becoming The Ethicist

This is a pre-reading activity for chosen selections of *Black Boy*. The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to make connections between themselves and a literary character or subject through the act of reading and guided consideration. This increases their buy-in to the literature, lets them contemplate difficult life decisions without risk, and sets up expectations of appealing tension and conflict in the text.

The Process

Find examples from the *New York Times Magazine* column "The Ethicist." There are hundreds of these on the *New York Times* website; you can select one or two that your students would find interesting. Share a few problems submitted by a reader with the students and engage them in a discussion about their responses. Encourage them to look at the problem from all perspectives involved. Read the columnist's responses; remind them that in literature and in our lives we are exposed more often than we realize to challenges where right and wrong are not always clearly delineated. Maybe they have some stories of their own to contribute to the discussion.

After presenting the following situation from *Black Boy*, group the students in threes (approximately, but more than this may ensure that not all contribute to the conversation). Let them discuss, prepare their statements and prepare to report their decision to the rest of the class. Contrast the different responses from each group in a final discussion. The problem: in chapter ten of *Black Boy* Wright contemplates breaking the law to fulfill his responsibility of taking care of his family. All other sources of income have dried up for him. Is he right to steal to feed his family? Is it ever right to steal from another? After reading selections of the text, return to these conversations and discuss how Wright approached the conflicts and challenges in his life and why. Finally, either before or after reading the chosen text selections, in their small groups or as individuals let the students become The Ethicist and write their own letter of response to Wright in the manner of the magazine column. They can do this in their small groups or as individuals.

Second Activity: Anatomy of a Vignette

This activity has the students looking back at a piece of writing, "Salvation," and forward to the task of writing an original vignette. The objectives are twofold: the first is for students to understand the power of a writer's use of images and sensory detail on the reader's emotional response; the second is for students to demonstrate their understanding that a vignette is not necessarily a story, but a snapshot that captures an idea or emotion. They will do this by isolating and analyzing images from the essay and using them to reduce its story to a vignette that captures one of the strong emotions that Hughes experiences.

The Process

After reading "Salvation" aloud in the classroom while the students follow along, or letting them take turns to do it themselves, give or let the students create a two-columned piece of paper headed "images" on the left and "emotions" on the right. In the left column, as a class, have them select strong sensory details and vivid nouns, skipping several spaces below each. They might come up with images like "the building rocked," "new young lambs," or "hot, crowded church." Across from each image on the right, students should write their thoughts about what emotions might accompany those images, either for themselves or Hughes. Lead them in

a brief discussion about the power these images have to evoke emotions or connections with the reader.

Next have students come up with a situation in their lives that was rich with an emotion. Have them select a list of vivid nouns and sensory images from their memory of the event and using the same two-columned format, list them on the left with their accompanying emotions on the right. Now they have a pre-writing document that can lead to the next steps of drafting and revising. This vignette could be one for the final selection of vignettes that students put together towards the end of the quarter.

Third Activity: Catching a Culture in Writing

One of the unit objectives was for students to reflect on cultural influences that have shaped their identities. They have seen this in all of reading selections so far. Selections from *The House on Mango Street* encourage readers to think more finitely about their own cultural influences through comparison or contrast by focusing on details, such as hair or traditions. We will read the whole text, but one of the vignettes we will pay special attention to is "Hairs." I'll provide photocopies so students can write on this particular one.

The Process

After we read the short piece aloud several times, students can highlight or underline strong sensory images, such as "hair like fur," "warm smell of bread," or "the snoring, the rain." We will discuss as a class how alive and personal the images are. While guiding students away from stereotypes, I will then ask them to silently select an aspect or two of their culture or family history that they feel affection or disdain for. Finally, they will emulate "Hairs" in a vignette of their own that captures the multi-sensory traits of one aspect of their cultures. If necessary, we will devote a side lesson on descriptive writing techniques, like the use of figurative language, contrast, and attribute modifiers. After brainstorming and drafting, we will follow the rest of the writing process and use peer groups for feedback.

Endnotes

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4. Ibid.
5. Katsiyannis, Antonis, Joseph B. Ryan, Dalun Zhang, and Anastasia Spann. "Juvenile Delinquency and Recidivism: The Impact of Academic Achievement." *Reading and Writing Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2008): 177-196.
6. Rogers-Adkinson, Diana, Kristine Melloy, Shannon Stuart, Lynn Fletcher, and Claudia Rinaldi. "Reading and Written Language Competency of Incarcerated Youth." *Reading and Writing Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2008): 197-218.
7. Thompson and Massat, et.al, as quoted by Alvarez, "I Had to Teach Hard."
8. MacCurdy, *The Mind's Eye*, 36.
9. Ibid., 33.
10. <http://www.bigpicture.org/>
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12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. MacCurdy, *The Mind's Eye*, 22.
15. Ibid., 67.
16. Ibid., 15.

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Competency of Incarcerated Youth." *Reading and Writing Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2008): 197-218.

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Classroom Resources

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Common Core Standards

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

Key Ideas and Details: standards 1,2

Craft and Structure: standards 5,6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: standard 9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: standard 10

Career and College Anchor Standards for Writing

Types and Purposes: standard 3

Production and Distribution of Writing: standards 4,5

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