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Could YOU be President?: Explaining and Exploring Presidential Possibility through Autobiography

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Introduction

Historically, African-Americans are one of the least represented voting classes in America. This unit aims to enfranchise and grant tangibility to the lives of black students in urban areas. I teach in a 98% black school where there is very little political involvement at the local or national level. By illustrating for students the meager means from which several of our nation's leaders have come, they will hopefully feel that they too can participate in our country's democracy.

In showing students that all presidents do not come from backgrounds of means, wealth, education, or even positive family lives, students may be more apt to willingly engage in the systems of their government. While a mass of literature seems to exist on this topic, the three Presidential autobiographies isolated in this unit (Lincoln, Clinton, and Obama) provide the best breadth for students in a high-needs school. The initial lives of all three places each in relative poverty, with minimal paternal influence and the motivation to pull oneself up from obscurity. In other words, these are the prototypical "rags-to-riches" narratives. This creates a space of correlation and empathy for urban students to reinforce the exploration that anyone from any circumstance can navigate their way into the office of the presidency.

The implementation of this unit is two-fold. Students will examine and analyze the autobiographies of three Presidents and one fictionalized graphic novel account. From this point of entry students will then hypothesize and actualize their own background and life with the reality of becoming President themselves. Students will write an argumentative essay defending their own background merits and presuppose their own ability to becoming president based on their current life factors and status. Additionally, students will draw out and illustrate their knowledge of presidential biography, quite literally, by creating their own fictionalized graphic novel of their possible ascendancy to the highest office in the land.

Rationale/Overview

Generally, the President is taught and discussed within the confines of a United States History or Civics classroom. This unit seeks to expand the possibility of discussion to students in an Honors Literature/English Language Arts classroom.

Five texts will be used within this unit: The Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln, Bill Clinton's *My Life*, Barak Obama's *Dreams from my Father*, *Presidential Material: Barak Obama* (a comic book treatment of Obama's background) and Kaiji Kawaguchi's *Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President*. The first four texts are strictly non-fiction, whereas Kawaguchi's manga graphic novel is a fictionalized account. The point of including the graphic novel and comic book serve multiple purposes. On one level students will find engagement and investment in this unit through the use of the accessible and relevant genres of manga and comics. Secondly, specifically in *Eagle*, by extracting the discussion of personal background and legacy into the realm of fiction allows students to speculate and further investigate the possibility of anyone (themselves included) seeking and being elected to the office of President.

In particular, this unit is described for use in an inner-city classroom. The disenfranchisement of African-Americans stems from a multitude of elements including but not limited to the previous exclusion from voting, lack of interest or knowledge of the process and, arguably, apathy and/or disillusionment with a system of representative democracy that is seemingly still non-representative of the needs, desires and outcomes of their race. While some gains have been made with the election of Barack Obama, as the 2012 election race barrels ahead, the president still seems merely a figurehead unable to address issues of race. Because Obama is of mixed racial origin, there are some factions of the African-American community that do not consider him to be truly the embodiment of "blackness" in America. All of these factors contribute to a continued disjuncture between these classes of voters and their investment and participation in American politics.

The function this Unit serves is to open up the discussion of who becomes President and how do they go about doing it. This is designed for ninth graders, which is a time in a student's academic history that can make or break their future. By opening up this discussion of possibility and biography, students will hopefully become aware of the influence their own decisions have on their futures and the possibilities that can help them achieve their goals, be it Presidential or otherwise.

Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the adolescent and educational backgrounds of Abraham Lincoln, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Kenneth Yamaoka to their own
- Speculate and argue the likelihood of their own ability to rise to the Office of President
- Gain a understanding and nuance perspective into the qualifications necessary of those elected to the office
- Understand that their life situation does not dictate their future and realize that they can overcome any

institutional/systematic barrier through perseverance and calculated planning

- After reading the fictionalized account of a person of minority ascending to President, create a comic book account of their own young life and the imagined reality of running for office
- Enumerate and analyze specific elements of autobiography (character, style and theme)
- Write a letter to their youngest sibling or cousin describing what they have learned about Presidential possibility throughout the course of the unit
- Feel a tangible connection between their lives and their participation in the United States government

A Note on Standards

This curriculum unit is designed for an elective credit class that is not tailored to any specific standards. This unit can however be easily adapted to the standards for both History as well as English classes within in High School level core standards.

Background

The Office of the President

From the birth of our nation forward, there have been debates, cases and discussion as to the real actual roles and limitations of the office. Clinton Rossiter, in one of the seminal and most widely referenced works on the office of the president, remarks on the roles our elected leader must fill. He enumerates them as: Chief of State, Chief Executive, Commander-in-Chief, Chief Diplomat, Chief Legislature, Chief of Party, Protector of the Peace, Manger of Prosperity and World Leader. ¹ All of these roles have been developed over time from the nation's founding document, the Constitution.

In terms of specific duties while in office, The United States Constitution outlines the power of Commander-in-Chief as well as the ability to appoint a Cabinet, outside of these and itemized duties, there is much analysis as to the roles of President while in office. One investigation aptly explains this openness of interpretation as "sentences and phrases that are the legal equivalent of genetically rooted baldness: their meaning, although determined at the very beginning, could only be discovered later". ² After the American Revolution, the Founding Fathers "learned from their experience with the British and colonial governments was that liberty is threatened by executive power and safeguarded by legislative power". ³ At the inception of our nation the founders had a firm understanding of what they did not want the government to become, namely a monarchy subject to tyranny. What they did want it to be, arguably, was still unclear until they could begin to see the intricacies play out and come to life. This is the reasoning behind such vague wording of the powers and scope of responsibility.

In another way, Rossiter explains the creation of the office as incredibly subjective, allowing for individual flair, likening it to a "wonderful stew whose unique flavor cannot be accounted for simply by making a list of its ingredients". ⁴ According to his viewpoint, the ambiguity is an open invitation for each individual to mold the office and its purpose to their own personal style. Either way, one thing is concrete: there is no definitive answer pertaining to the specific and truncated rules and roles of the office.

As relating to who can become president, The Constitution of the United States outlines very little in terms of

biographical description, less so even than the powers vested in the individual. In Article II, Section I, very simply states:

No person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of the President; neither shall any Person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Year a Resident within the United States.

In other words, in our modern times, the only limitations of presidential biographical qualification to the office are that the person must be a citizen born in the United States and aged at least thirty-five years. While implicit, it is necessary to point out that there are no other factors within in this defining Article that inhibit any person of any gender, race, creed or sexual orientation from obtaining election. Within the classroom setting, it is incredibly important to remark upon this lack of definition as the opening of possibility to any and every person citizen of natural birth after they achieve a certain age.

After the general discussion (or brief refresher course, depending on the knowledge and retention of students) of the biography, rights, abilities and enumerated qualifications of the office of President, as well as the extreme ambiguity therein, students should be sufficiently able to move into the study and discussion of the elements and possibilities of pre-Presidential lives.

The Genre of Presidential Autobiography

The American Presidency is one of the most revered offices in the United States. Additionally, it well-known and commented upon globally. Many pundits and political science scholars discuss the office, its privileges and its limitations. When the process of electing a new candidate for office begins, it appears more and more time is being spent belaboring aspects of upbringing, personal history and experiences of those hoping to attain the lofty office of the Presidency. As we swiftly progress through the age of information, these questions of heritage, adolescence and background become both increasingly discussed and more readily available to be researched due to the proliferation and immediacy of the Internet. The ability to hear the President, in his own words, describe his life provides a special insight and a strict sense of legitimacy to the story.

Autobiography in itself is a tricky genre. The discerning reader must continually take into account the motivations and omissions, inadvertent or otherwise, that personal writing elicits. Autobiography becomes even more cumbersome as an additional lens of politics is overlaid. One scholar notes that presidents "use the words to define not only themselves but the way Americans see them".⁵ Though many presidents, even prior to the modern age, have written autobiographies of some fashion or form, little by way of theoretical scholarship exists. The most useful study is a 2010 dissertation in which Allen Coe enumerates and analyzes the extended history of presidential autobiography. In this study he points out "approximately half of American presidents have produced either a full or partial narrative record of their lives, and recent presidential autobiographies have been released to full-scale media attention".⁶ Those who hold the office of President clearly feel the need to describe their lives and upbringing, more often than not to justify choices, both in office and in life.

An opposing scholar questions the literary merit of such writings, pointing out that the form is not "universally applauded by professional historians or political scientists".⁷ Luckily, for all intents and purposes of this curriculum unit, the audience is students seeking in some way to come to grips with elements of the human condition and experience. While in the grandest academic sense, there may be some questioning to the

validity to the genre, masses of people throughout history who have found these narratives worthy of attention, even if only at the basest appeal to the sense of understanding the human comedy.

In terms of teaching this genre, reference to William Howarth's article, "Some Principles of Autobiography" provides a solid base upon which the educator can help students to organize and their observations about the texts read throughout the duration of this unit. He provides the analogy of autobiography as self-portraiture, from which one can extract three types of observation. These are those of: Character, Theme and Style. ⁸ For further reference to these elements, see lesson plan Three.

Abraham Lincoln's Autobiography

Abraham Lincoln wrote a brief autobiography of himself at the behest of an Illinois citizen, Jessie Fell, in December 1859 while he was running for office. ⁹ In a short, handwritten three-pages Lincoln simply explains his birth and early life, including the heritage of his parents. This short letter stands in contrast to many lengthy tomes other Presidents have produced. It may be productive to direct students toward a discussion as to the need for information overload about a candidate, or if this more simple and concise version is sufficient to decide one's vote.

Of specific interest to many students is the description of his schooling as "nothing to excite ambition for education". ¹⁰ Many students groan and complain about school as boring and will thus find this quotation relatable, if not also amusing. However, later Lincoln remarks "The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity". ¹¹ The lesson herein is one of the very American ideal of "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps". Though education was sparsely provided for Lincoln, he found it through his own desire and necessity to seek it out. This story of seeking out what one needs to be successful will resonate with students who may not have everything they've wanted or needed. Aspiration is a powerful and inspirational force and students who have less need to understand that they can be part of the American notion as well.

Outside of his comments on his schooling, Lincoln remarks upon the humble nature of his family, simply listing the family names and where they lived. Lincoln calls his parents heritage as, "of undistinguished families" reinforcing the modesty that is characteristic of the man. ¹² This also reinforces the idea that one does not have to be of means to become President. Lincoln's families was not rich, nor were they well connected.

Additionally, Lincoln suffers the death of his mother at age six, showing readers, again, that he is able to overcome whatever he dealt. ¹³ These lessons are ones that students can connect and relate to. The loss of a parent comes in many forms, including divorce, death or remarriage. More often than not students in Southwest Philadelphia are dealing the trauma of the loss of a parent or guardian figure. This illustration will hopefully connect with students and empower them to not be held back by personal loss.

This short account is simply written and perfect for students to begin their interaction with presidential self-description. The humility and simplicity of this brief epistle also provides a good lesson on concise and modesty that is also important to express to students as they embark upon writing lives themselves.

My Life - The Autobiography of Bill Clinton

I was fascinated by people, politics and policy, and I thought I could make it without family wealth, or connections, or establishment southern positions on race and other issues. Of course it

was improbable, but isn't that what America is all about?" ¹⁴

The story of William Jefferson Clinton is definitely one of determination. The central inquiry of this unit, who becomes President and how do they do it, is tackled head on in the statement above. Clinton decided he wanted to go into politics because he found it interesting and simply put, he did so. He remarks, "Sometime in my sixteenth year I decided I wanted to be in public life as an elected official". ¹⁵ His narrative is one of a poor boy from Arkansas who came from a family of no means and found his way through personal wherewithal into a life of politics.

His story is one of academic achievement, as well. Though he grew up in a family with a dead biological father and a drunken adoptive one, his mother made sure his education was seen after from a very early age. He often received high academic marks in school, helping him to rise to the top of his class. Recalling his first courses in college, he remembers his own enchantment with reading *Macbeth*. He shares an anecdote about visiting a classroom when running for governor and reciting lines he remembered from a previous age. Clinton remarks "I recited the lines for them, the words still full of power for me." ¹⁶ This further demonstrates Clinton's love of learning and breadth of knowledge. This anecdote serves to illustrate the perspective of earnestness and passion that characterizes Clinton.

This helped him attend Georgetown University and Yale Law School, as well as the high credential of Rhodes Scholar. This juxtaposes well with the lack of education Lincoln received as a boy and the seeming lack of motivation the young Barack Obama exhibited in high school.

Clinton's adolescence is filled with moments of opportunity sought and taken, from his involvement in student council to a Boys Nation trip to Washington, D.C. For students reading this text, connections exist between their own lives and the possibilities that are truly available to them, should they seek them out. Clinton's erudite momentum speaks to students who do have scholarly motivation as a counterbalance to Barack Obama's mid-high school slump (see below).

Bill Clinton became known for his Welfare policies during his presidency as well as his open-mind and awareness to matters of race. He discusses his early years in which he openly played with black children who came into his grandfather's store and his lack of realization that he was "the only white kid that did that". ¹⁷ His colorblindness and racial empathy is a current that runs throughout his life and his presidency. His story is one of toleration of difference and maintaining a positive outlook. This will serve as exemplary material for students to find both a relatable and empathetic character and role model in Clinton.

These stories are not to idolize or paint Clinton as a goody two-shoes. He had his fair share of fights, troublemaking at times, and most heart-wrenchingly, the problem of a drunk and abusive step-father at home. Despite these obstacles, Clinton chose to persevere and focus. This element of his life narrative is the motivational and uplifting piece that students will find some kinship with. Though they may not be dealing with the exact same issues, undoubtedly teenagers of all demographics find at least one stumbling block in their teen years which they must negotiate.

It's hard not to lose oneself in story of the Comeback Kid. The book has received criticism for Clinton's hefty \$15 million advance, however, to discount its intent or integrity merely on money given in anticipation of (accurately predicted) success is seemingly trite and unwarranted. ¹⁸ While *My Life* in itself is a daunting tome, close to 1000 pages in its entirety, the first 100 or so provide excellent fodder for this project.

Clinton's voice is clear and concise, but simultaneously filled with compassion and appreciation for others. From the death of his biological father prior to his birth to the tumultuous relationships of his mother throughout his childhood, Clinton quickly paints his youth as painful and turbulent, but constantly rimmed with the silver lining of his own positive outlook. Perhaps he can afford to look back to the trials of his youth with rose-colored lenses with his two-term presidency and enormous financial success; however this does not mean there are not lessons that can be gleaned and imparted to students.

While many have hoped for some insight into the more juicy elements of Clinton's president, this book provides no such information. The end result here is a better insight into the aspects of Clinton's life that made him the person he is, rather than an expose of the mistakes and scandals that came out of his tenure as our nation's leader. While not groundbreaking, this is worth mention, particularly as some many be wary of using the text under the suspicion that it could include illicitly sexual material.

Barack Obama - Two forms of Life Narrative

There are two options for teaching the childhood years of Barack Obama: his autobiographical memoir, *Dreams from my Father* and a comic book biography, *Presidential Material*. Depending on the reading level and engagement of students, as well as the time constraints within the classroom, either or both texts provide a generous scope of Obama's life story and influences.

Dreams from My Father

The request for this text occurred after Obama's election as the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review*. This makes this text an interesting study in motivations of autobiographical writing, as there was not an overt political motivation upon his drafting of this memoir. Presidential biography scholar Allen Coe notes: "Obama's works have also earned praise for their literary qualities".¹⁹ His words are a rich and worthwhile exploration in a literary or English/Language Arts classroom as a relevant and accessible example of well-written non-fiction prose in addition to the analytical aspects of biography.

The subtitle of *Dreams from My Father* reads: "A Story of Race and Inheritance". This narrative coming from our first president of African descent makes for a compelling story in which students in the inner-city classroom will find a foothold to find relevance in a very personal way. Many of them have experienced, or will experience, the same pitfalls and issues pertaining to being black in America. The multiculturalism of his childhood experience can also open up and uplift ideas to students who may feel that their own biography is a limitation as opposed to a gift.

President Barack Obama's first book, *Dreams from my Father*, is divided into three parts. While the book in its entirety is accessible to high school students from ninth grade and on, for the purposes of this unit, "Part One: Origins" provides the richest source material.

The first chapter of Origins outlines how his mother and father met and he came to be. He discusses his grandparents, who play a crucial role in his early upbringing. Next, Obama recounts his mother's remarriage to Lolo, an Indonesian man. Lolo gets along with the family and is kind and generous; however, soon the pressure of his job begins to affect him, causing strife between the couple, eventually ending in divorce.

It is during this time period that young Barack first recalls his mother's gentle teachings, such as telling him "If you want to grow into a human being you're going to need some values".²⁰ Perhaps this same voice was the one that echoed in his head years later when, after moving back to Hawaii to attend grade school, Barack

found himself apathetic and disenfranchised. She confronts him, asking "Don't you think you're being a little casual about your future?" ²¹ . This conversation resonates with Obama as he finds himself in a low places, particularly, as he notes, during periods of drinking and drug use. His mother's voice and sense of morals that she instills within her son help guide him throughout his life. This lends for an excellent discussion with students about adult guidance and influence in their lives.

Additionally, as explained in the anecdote above, the fact that Obama himself was not the over-achieving joiner in high school (much unlike Clinton) and made mistakes and took chances along the way helps to make him a more relatable character for students to engage with. The apathy of Obama's high school years juxtaposed with his personal success and literary merit will certainly speak to students who may find themselves struggling to find success or motivation toward success in their own youths. They see him struggling with many of the same issues that they struggle with in the first six chapters, and in this parallel to their lives there is hope that students will find inspiration and motivation to drastically alter the course they think their lives are on.

Similarly, while at college, Obama cries out, "Don't you know who I am? I'm an individual", ²² during a phase of self-discovery and exploration of the constructs of racial actualization. The moment from the bottom of page 99 to mid 100, in which Obama rifts momentarily on minorities being engulfed by the dominant majority, is a prime candidate for close reading and passage study, especially within an urban classroom. Recalling that the aim of this unit is for students to examine how one ascends to the office of the Presidency in the United States, it is important to point out the discordance that our current President felt as an adolescent and young man, and invite students to see these as places with which they can not only engage with the story but also compare and contrast Obama's life with their life and near future.

Presidential Material

Designed for the presidential election of 2008, the biographical information from Obama's *Dreams from my Father* is illustrated and collected in comic book form to create a decent stand-in or excellent augmentation to the Part One: Origins reading selections. Written prior to his election as President of the United States, the traces Obamas life through his childhood and college years, ending at his clinching of the Democratic Presidential nomination.

Spanning only 28 pages, I envision this text to be used as a comparative lesson in the problem of reducing a story too much. Student can comment upon the loss of girth to Obama's story and arguably the impact that has on the case we will make as a class, answering the question of who can become president and what biographical aspects they should seemingly have in place.

However, as mentioned previously, this text could work as a stand in for struggling readers or as an alternative option for scaffolding within an inclusion classroom.

Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President - A Graphic Novel by Kaiji Kawaguchi

Manga in America is a widely misconstrued genre of print entertainment. As one scholar points out there is a widely spread belief that manga is character with doe-eyes, filled with violence and overly sexualized images ²³ . While the Bambi-like eyes are present in many manga publications, and some do include sex or violence, to lump all publications into this single category is to do a disservice to the varied mass of books and magazines that exist. In Japan, it is well respected and read by all classes and generations of people.

Current and future students will have grown up in a time period of global entertainment in which they are familiar and accepting, as well as often knowledgeable, about the genre of manga. For further history and information on the genre, see Appendix.

Eagle is a graphic novel of a fictionalized account of the ascendancy of Kenneth Yamaoka to president. Steeped in drama and often exposing the darker, manipulative side of politics, *Eagle* lends well to opening up the creative side of this unit.

While reading this graphic novel, the students will be able to envision a second story of a member of a minority rising to the role of President. Written in 2000, the idea of Obama as President was yet to be conceived. By drawing parallels between his election and the election of Kenneth Yamaoka student will further be able to expand their understanding of the non-fiction texts they have read. Additionally, as one review states, the manga series helps to actualize and visualize a world in which someone viewed as Other within the realm of American politics could become President. ²⁴ Because this is a manga novel written originally for Japanese readers, there are brief moments where the more complicated factors of American politics, such as the Electoral College, are explicitly explained. This is useful for the American student reader as well because these definitions and explanations help the student gain a further grasp of the political system that they are studying.

To coincide with the themes of the other readings in this unit, once again students will see the recurrent idea that one can come from nothing and become something. This is important and worthy of reinforcement because so frequently in their lives they are signaled that they cannot be successful, be it by the media, their government, their peers/community, and sometimes, sadly even their teachers/educational system.

Again, as in the case of *Presidential Material*, students will easily buy into this text, as they will find it engaging and relevant. Particularly in this case, while they believe they are taking the "easy" way out by reading a book with pictures, they are in fact taking on a very challenging text and set of assumptions without realizing the hard work they are doing.

Strategies

Text to Self/Text to World Connections

Every lesson taught in this unit asks students to compare some elements of the autobiography or graphic novel, character, setting or events to their own lives. By creating these moments in the curriculum, students are more willing to participate and share because it involves their own lives and experiences. They also are then able to produce a closer, more personal reading of the text being used. These connections create a classroom environment in which students feel they are autonomous and have a validated opinion and viewpoint.

Lesson Plan Format

The lessons provided in this curriculum unit follow the seven-step lesson plan mandated by the agreement between the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The seven steps are: Do Now (Warm-up or Anticipation Set); Direction Instruction; Guided Practice; Independent Practice; Closing

(including Exit Ticket); Homework and Assessment. This format provides a cyclical feedback between student and teacher that ensures understanding and proper comprehension of given material. Lessons can build on one another using the Do Now as a recall of the previous lesson or Independent Practice as a synthesis activity, combining concepts from a previous lesson with the current day's topic.

Before, During and After Reading Strategies

Before, During and After Reading Strategies (BDA) are extremely useful for constant feedback while students are studying the various presidential biographies. "Before" strategies include KWL (know/wonder/learned) charts, historical context introductory lessons, identifying and defining terms and vocabulary, and anticipation guides; "During" strategies include comprehension questions, double-column journals, making predictions while reading and character trait/action tracking. "After" strategies range from a simple multiple-choice post-reading assessments to a research paper or debate speech. It is important to note through each of these stages of the reading process students are constantly reading, writing and thinking about reading and writing. BDA strategies check-in and monitor students' progress throughout the entirety of the text and provide pause in order for the teacher to interject, suggest and discuss elements of previously introduced historical and cultural contexts.

Notes and Information Organization

The nature of this topic lends to a rather lengthy accumulation of information. In order to prevent classroom fatigue, students will record, connect and organize what they have learned in a variety of ways. Graphic organizers are an exceedingly popular method for students to visually layout and align what they learn. These organizers can be provided by the teacher as a photocopy, drawn on a board for a class creation or students can copy a template into their notebooks. Additionally, the two-column note format, sometimes called Cornell Notes, is an easy way for the teacher to lecture while students take notes in a guided and systematic manner. Throughout the course of this unit students will take this style of notes on specific topics as an initial introduction to a subject. Then students will use the notes to assist their learning and reactivate their knowledge as they explore each topic more in depth through participation in the extension activities. All sets of Cornell Notes will be kept in their notebooks creating a reference library for their personal perusal.

Collaborative Student Learning

At several points throughout the unit, students will be invited to work with one another during classroom activities. A prominent idea behind collaborative student learning is that it allows for students to interact on a peer-to-peer level and potentially communicate ideas about the subject of study in a manner different from that of the teacher. For low-level learners the benefit lies in direct and specific feedback that is sustainably longer and more intense than a teacher could give any single student in a normal period. For higher-level learners, understanding and synthesis is encouraged when they are "teaching" another student information that they have comprehended. Teaching someone else is the number one activity that encourages thought synthesis and idea analysis.

Jigsaws take information, split it up in three to ten groups and require the students in each group to become experts on their bit of knowledge and teach it back to the class. Students who are watching each presentation take notes or fill out a worksheet to retain and record all of the "pieces" with the idea that when students have all information the puzzle will become clear. Jigsaws are useful in a variety of settings.

Another variation of a grouping or "information chunking" activity that requires collaboration amongst

students is the more traditional station rotation. In this exercise, student groups travel between multiple stations, each with a piece or specific topic of information related to the whole. The exercise is summarized by individually answering a writing prompt which ties together the elements of the different stations to gauge student understanding and mastery of the material.

Some Principles of Autobiography

The plan for analysis that William Howarth provides in his article "Some Principles of Autobiography" provides an excellent tool within the classroom, when dissected and implemented by the teacher. In other words, don't have high school students read this article; they won't understand it. Reliance on this piece of writing in terms of creating lessons, however, is invaluable. He discusses autobiographical narrative as self-portrait, as narrative drama, and as poetic verse. These categories are a great place for students to begin thinking about the autobiographical mode. Questions in which students explore different excerpts in a graphic organizer with any of the modes will create a space for a deep analysis to occur. Similarly, the elements of character, theme and style, which Howarth, also discusses in his article, can be given to studies to identify elements of each as they read throughout the unit.

Socratic Style Seminars

In Socratic Style Seminars students turn desks into a large circle in which, with the teacher also seated within the circle, discussions, readings and activities are completed. This strategy helps to encourage participation by all students. When discussing a topic or a text, students must respect each other's opinions and wait to speak. These norms as well as other should be discussed, established and posted in the classroom prior to beginning any conversation. Once the precedent is set, management in this more open style becomes very easy. Students can pose questions to one another or to the teacher and may work as a group on related assignments as necessary. Students feel that their voice is valued and wanted in these types of activities, as they are given the opportunity to say what they think about something.

Journaling

As part of a school wide initiative, a small amount of homework is to be assigned each night to reinforce concepts or explore further what was taught in class. Journaling is an excellent way to have students reflect on a character, theme or event. Journals have neither set length nor much a formal style. Some title and the student name are usually sufficient. Students write in a free-associative style about a particular topic as directed by the teacher. These topics can be broad and large or specific as the purpose serves. For instance, within this unit some sample journal prompts are as follows: 1) WHO becomes President? HOW do they do it? 2) What part of Bill Clinton's young life do you feel resembles yours? If no part resembles your life, explain how at least two elements of his childhood were different from yours. 3) Why do you think Abraham Lincoln was so motivated to learn that he read in his spare time and was mostly self-taught? Are you motivated in this manner? Could you teach yourself something? Why or why not?

Non-Linguistic Representation/Visual Modalities

It is common knowledge that each pupil comes into the classroom with different learning styles. More and more, as the age we live in progresses toward a culture saturated with masses of images, students we teach learn and respond to images. The use of graphic novels and comic books within this unit works to appeal to the learning styles and sensibilities of students today. Regardless if students engage with the material because it catches their eye or because they think they're taking the easy way out, when it comes to reading,

students learn and absorb information readily and willingly when exposed to knowledge and concepts in these forms.

Classroom Activities

Lesson Plan One - Unit Preview

To open the unit, students will preview some selections of the texts they will be reading. To begin, students will complete a 5 minute Do-Now in which they will answer the questions "Who can become President? How do they do it?" The teacher will transition students into a brief note-taking session in which the short passage describing the Presidency from primary source document, The United States Constitution is examined and a graphic organizer is completed outlining the specific qualifications for President. '

Students then complete a free response writing activity about the possibility of one of their classmates, or themselves, becoming President. Do they meet the qualifications outline in the Constitution? Can they run for office and gain election by the people? To follow the writing activity, the class will gather in a Socratic Seminar Circle and discuss "politics".

As mentioned in the Strategies section of this Unit, it is crucial to establish Norms and Expectations for behavior in this style of seating/discussion at the outset of the first discussion and as necessary throughout the school year. A list of guiding questions will be distributed by the teacher. Ten will usually suffice; examples for this discussion include "Is race an issue for someone running for President? Why? How? Explain" or "Does one have to be rich to run for President? Back it up with proof!" The teacher takes notes on student behavior, moderates and scores for participation.

This lesson will culminate with a return to regular seating and an Exit Ticket. The Exit Ticket will be a 3-2-1, in which students list Three Things they Learned Today, Two Questions or Comments, One Piece of Feedback on Today's Class.

Lesson Plan Two - Who Becomes President?: Adolescent Biography and the Race for President

To begin, in reference to Lesson One, students will create a list of the qualifications to become President. Teacher will ask students to share-out answers, then encourage students to remember that anyone's adolescence can grow into a influential career.

Next, a bulleted list of four distinct figures biographies will be displayed on the Smart Board or projector screen. Individually, students will speculate the profession of each figure described. Sample biographical selections could include Ted Kaczynski, Condoleezza Rice, George Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr. After the true identities are revealed, the class will be split into two groups. Keeping in mind the lessons taken away from the first activity, students will be instructed to read a selection and determine the profession of the person described. The teacher will split students into two groups. Group One will read a brief selection of Obama's narrative and Group Two will read a selection from Bill Clinton's. The students will discuss within their groups and make their predictions. After allotted time has passed groups will share out their results and teacher will reveal the identities.

Students will discuss as a class briefly, then answer five thought responses about biography (Does it matter if you are rich or poor/smart or uneducated/connected or unknown when it comes to being president?), assumption (If someone has a troublesome or rough childhood, does this mean they will not do well in life? Explain your answer.), profession (What type of person becomes President? What makes them liked enough to get elected?), professional ability and personal motivation (Do you believe in the phrase, "Where there's a will, there's a way."? Explain your answer.). The lesson will culminate with a short written response by students as an Exit Ticket, in which they answer the question "What are the three most valuable take away you've received from this lesson?"

Lesson Plan Three - Teaching the Elements of Autobiography

Once students begin thinking about the qualifications one must have to run for President, the class will shift gears to discuss generic consider the mode of autobiography. It is important to encourage students to be critical and aware of intent in writing at this point in the Unit. If they do not understand authorial motivation, a mini-lesson to address this deficiency may be in order. This lesson is to be taught after one or more of the autobiographical texts have been read.

The Do Now for this lesson will direct students to describe what they know about the mode of autobiography and biography. After the 5-minute Do Now time has expired, the teacher will briefly illicit responses from the class. Then, a T-Chart comparing Biography vs. Autobiography will be taken in students' classroom notebook guided by the teacher.

Students will then number off and break out into six stations around the room. Supplied with a chart, students will travel to each station for 3-5 minutes and read about the Elements of Autobiography. They will take notes in their graphic organizer, then move to the next station. After the students have circulated through, the class will reconvene and the elements will be considered against one of the autobiographical texts. If all have not been read, students will retain organizer until all are complete and in turn, also use it for a study tool. To culminate this activity, students will recount the difference between biography and autobiography and explain the six elements of autobiography in their own words.

Annotated Bibliography

"Abraham Lincoln's Brief and Modest Autobiography; Written in His Own Handwriting in the Year 1860." Chicago Tribune, 1909. Brief newspaper article relating the history of Lincoln's handwritten document. Samples of the letter are provided as inset.

Brinkley, Alan, and Davis Dyer. *The American Presidency*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. A comprehensive volume of presidential biography. Each president is given a 5-10 page treatment in which his early life, campaign, office and post-presidential activity is briefly discussed.

Berninger, Mark, Jochen Ecke, and Gideon Haberkorn. *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures: Essays on the Interplay of Media, Disciplines and International Perspectives*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2010. This book offers a variety of essays considering global viewpoints on the phenomenon of comic books and graphic narrative. Of particular interest is the discussion of East meets West and the difference in perspectives.

Coe, Allen Fletcher. "The President's Pen: A Literary History of American Presidential Autobiographies." PhD, University of Maryland,

2010. Exceedingly useful in its scholarship, this dissertation unpacks the genre of Presidential autobiography and provides a keen analysis of multiple works, spanning all ages of the United States Presidency.

Clinton, Bill. *My Life*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005. The autobiography of former president Bill Clinton is a massive tome, even by biographical standards. To the dismay of many there are no apologetics or tell-all confessions here. There are, however, many genuine anecdotes and memories of our former leader. As you are reading you can hear the diction and prosody of Clinton's voice resonating throughout the work. The second half may be only worth scanning, as it does become as tedious journal of political meetings, but don't miss out the first one hundred or so pages where the meat of the moral education of the man Bill Clinton is explored.

Egerton, George. "Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as Polygenre." *Biography* 15, no. 3 (1992): 221-242. This article specifically discusses the political memoir as a blend of styles of writing, including historical, persuasive and biographical. A great counterbalance to Coe's dissertation. Provides an alternative perspective on the legitimacy of presidential narrative.

Gravett, Paul. *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*. New York: Collins Design, 2004. Perhaps the most comprehensive study on Japanese Manga to date. Filled with colorful illustrations Gravett explores the history, present and future movements of manga in his thoughtful and well researched book. His substantial research is visually augmented in a way that the reader sees the progression of the genre throughout Japanese history. An easy and informative read, even for the less enthusiastic novel reader, or perhaps, just the type of reader who would enjoy a comic book!.

Howarth, William L. "Some Principles of Autobiography." *New Literary History* 5, no. 2 (1974): 363-381. In this article Howarth seeks to find a unified analysis and understanding of the genre of autobiography. He breaks out his analysis into three elements of the autobiographical mode: Character, Theme and Style. He then goes on to discuss different metaphors and comparisons for autobiography, such as "Autobiography as Oratory" and "Autobiography as Poetry". This article is a useful read for understanding the construct of the autobiography and its history.

Huang, Betsy. "Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President Review." *MELUS* 32, no. 3 (2007): 283-284. Huang reviews and discusses Kaiji Kawaguchi's political storytelling.

"In their Own Words; Political Memoirs." *The Economist* (2009): 392.

Bill Clinton's book deal and other political writings are remarked upon.

Kawaguchi, Kaiji. *Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President*. Vol. 1. San Francisco: Viz Communications, Inc., 2000. A serialized manga that presupposes the ascendancy of a minority to the office of President of the United States; Kenneth Yamaoka and his secret son, Takashi Jo trudge down the campaign trail together as Kenneth tries to clinch the election. Filled with drama and some romance, *Eagle* is also a story of a man with a dream. Because this manga novel was originally written for a Japanese audience, the intricacies of the election of the president are broken down and explained, creating an excellent illustrative text to explain the inner workings of our government to students.

Lincoln, Abraham. *The Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Francis D. Tandy Company, 1905. In this monumental document, Abraham Lincoln explains his humble origins and his route through self-education and into law. This brief epistle, written by request while Lincoln was running for public office, has an economy of language which Lincoln is known. His self-perseverance and motivation are inspiring and call one to emulate. A copy of the original document can be easily found through an online search if of use in ones' classroom.

Mariotte, Jeff, Tom Morgan, Andy Helfer, and Stephen Thompson. *Presidential Material*. San Diego, CA: IDW Pub., 2008. A comic book version of the background of Presidential Candidate Barack Obama. Pairs well with *Dreams from My Father* as the first few anecdotes

mirror those discussed in the first chapters of Barack Obama's book.

Milkis, Sidney M. and Michael Nelson. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776–2007*. 5th ed. CQ Press, 2007. This book explains how the presidency evolved as an office throughout the history of the United States. It is very comprehensive in nature, but goes much too in detail on many matters that are unnecessary for the purposes of this unit. The introduction is useful and provides a more practical summary.

Obama, Barack. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004. Barack Obama discusses his upbringing and career in the context of racial experience in America. He effectively explains who he is, where he came from and what he stands for in this eloquently written volume.

Rossiter, Clinton. "The Powers of the Presidency." In *The American Presidency*, 15. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1987. Well-regarded and oft-quoted Rossiter's analysis of the office, duties and powers of the Chief Executive is a hallmark in the world of political science texts. For a quick flavor, simply read the first chapter; for a more in-depth discussion of the ideas he outlines read chapters to follow accordingly.

Schodt, Frederick L. *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*. Tokyo International: New York. The original manga encyclopedia, Schodt has dedicated a lifetime to learning and educating on Japanese culture. This book has become outdated overtime, as manga has now substantially expanded in terms of global recognition, the book still has relevance and provides an impassioned perspective on what was, at one time, a relatively obscure form of entertainment in the West.

Appendix

A Brief Overview of the History and Genre of Manga

Before embarking upon teaching and using a manga text in the classroom, it is crucial for the educator to understand some basic tenets about the genre and its history. Without the underpinning one runs the risk of being called-out by students who are much savvier about the genre than we could possibly imagine. For them, it is not merely an extension of comics but rather a form of entertainment in its own right and any student born post-1990 will be familiar with it in some fashion in form. As there is nothing that undermines the authority of a teacher more than not knowing or misspeaking on a subject, this exploration is very pertinent.

In the simplest form, manga means Japanese comics. However, to stop at this whittled down definition would be a disservice to the genre and one's own knowledge. Manga is not just comics, and particularly not at all like the comics we have come to know in America. Superheroes do exist but are not the primary focus. There are sub-genres for men and women. There are instructional manuals as well as histories and recipe books. One scholar explains, "Early-learning and school textbooks are available in manga form, as are study and revision guides for college students. You can learn about almost anything via manga".²⁵ In Japan, manga frequently outsells and is more culturally persuasive than television and films. Books are produced "weekly, bi-weekly or at least monthly with print runs up to 6 million each".²⁶ The prices are kept very low as to allow readers to buy and leave behind the books/magazines after purchase, tailoring to the compact home lives of Japanese citizens. Additionally, subscription "cafes" abound in which one pays a membership fee to enter and read their share of a variety of titles offered; a lending library of sorts.²⁷

The proliferation of these texts extends far back into the cultural memory of the Island Nation. Pre-manga stretches back as early as the 12th-century with "drawings painted onto paper scrolls as much as 20 feet in length and placed in sequence to tell of legends, battles and events from daily life".²⁸ The Japanese Ministry of Culture and Education supplies teachers with "a three-page illustrated history to help covering the uninterrupted continuity between historic picture scrolls and prints and manga".²⁹ This connection, perhaps, lends a history to the medium that makes room for the involvement of grown adults as easily as it appeals to younger adolescents.

When American comics were first introduced overseas in the 1950s, they gained popularity and then began to morph into the cultural phenomenon that is now manga. In a sense, manga is the Japanese response and reappropriation of American comics into a unique format that is truly their own.

For many decades, Japanese studies scholar Frederick L. Schodt's *Manga! Manga!* was the only comprehensive study on the form, deemed (albeit unverified) the "Bible of Manga". In reality, it was the only book available that provided more than an article length treatment on the subject. Originally, published in 1983, Schodt was the first to delve into the complex, varied world of manga. Up to this point, manga was largely un-translated, giving rise to a primary issue of basic understanding. Additionally, Japanese manga books are read back to front, up and down, then left to right, to mimic the way the Japanese language is read and written, which creates a second disjuncture in understanding. While Schodt does an acceptable job at substantiating the genre, there are many areas of blindness and also some incongruities of fact. As with all realms of knowledge, one runs a great risk when relying on one source as the be-all end-all of explanation.

Enter Paul Gravett. Seeing some of the misunderstandings and short-sights of Schodt, Gravett sets out to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to this Japanese phenomenon. Gravett also has the luxury of writing in an era when manga has crossed the ocean and become much more prolific in the United States. Children have devoured many of the crazes from overseas and in doing so have created a mass-market for the books, fueling translations, adaptations and spin-offs. As the world becomes more global and the popularity of the genre has exploded into a legitimate source of culture and entertainment for populations across the world, it seems that Gravett's text is more comprehensive and infused with a wider understanding of the genre on an international level, not just as a singular occurrence.

Endnotes

1. Clinton Rossiter, "The Powers of the Presidency," in *The American Presidency*, 15-43.
2. Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, "The Constitutional Convention," in *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776-2007*, 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 3.
4. Clinton Rossiter, "The Powers of the Presidency," in *The American Presidency*, 41.
5. Allen Fletcher Coe, "The President's Pen: A Literary History of American Presidential Autobiographies" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2010), 2.
6. *Ibid.*, i.
7. George Egerton, "Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as Polygenre," in *biography* 15, no. 3 (1992): 221.
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February 7, 1909, 2.

10. Abraham Lincoln, "Autobiographical Sketch Written for Jesse W. Fell, December 20, 1859," in *The Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln*, 34.
11. *Ibid.*, 34.
12. *Ibid.*, 32.
13. *Ibid.*, 33.
14. Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 63.
15. *Ibid.*, 63.
16. *Ibid.*, 59.
17. Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 12.
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19. Allen Fletcher Coe, "The President's Pen: A Literary History of American Presidential Autobiographies" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2010), 264.
20. Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father*", 49.
21. *Ibid.*, 93.
22. *Ibid.*, 100.
23. *Ibid.*, 8.
24. Besty Huang, "Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President Review", in *MELUS* 32, no 3 (2007): 283.
25. Paul Gravett, "The All-Encompassing," in *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*, 119.
26. Holger Briel, "The Roving Eye Meets Traveling Pictures: The Field of Vision and the Global Rise of Adult Manga," in *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures*, 187.
27. *Ibid.*, 40.
28. Paul Gravett, "Japanese Spirit, Western Learning," in *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*, 18.
29. *Ibid.*, 18.

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