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The Story of Me

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Introduction

Young students love to tell the stories of their lives. So many of their experiences are happening to them or around them for the first time, making each memorable and, frankly, formative. As adults, we still carry such intensely meaningful events as memories formed by the powerful impact they had on our senses and feelings.

This six-to eight-week unit is designed for second graders to learn that biographies, the lives of people, are written expressions of memories and stories. The memories and stories in this case will be their own. The students will be introduced to the autobiographical stories of two children's authors, Patricia Polacco and Tomie dePaola. These mentor texts will set the foundation for the students to write, illustrate and publish their own autobiography of small moments in a series of bound picture books. Their inspiration and information will come from personal photographs at home and at school as well as from their own drawings and art work.

Rationale

Edgewood School is an arts-integrated magnet school with a focus on visual literacy as a school-wide initiative. This approach inherently allows, supports and encourages cross-curricular teaching and embraces all types of learners. Our neighborhood/magnet school setting is a rewarding environment, with students coming to school each day from a variety of home circumstances and with differences in academic levels. As a result of these variables, the children have differing levels of background knowledge and life experiences. Teaching through the arts opens the doors and minds to learning opportunities.

Concepts/Content

In her book, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Hermione Lee discusses definitions of biography. She begins with two entries in the 1971 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "The history of the lives of individual men, as a branch of literature" and "A written record of the life of an individual." ¹ These may satisfy in a general way, but the genre has evolved since these entries were written — or maybe the definition is just more complex than its literal meaning of "life-writing." What about oral presentation, speaking or documentary-style viewing, or women? Lee further examines the idea that there must be some qualifiers or rules for biography as a genre, only to determine that a decisive definition is a moving target. ² This instability, Lee suggests, makes biography a "shape-shifting, contradictory, variable form." Lee admits that, in the end, there actually are no rules for doing biography. ³

Biography itself has its own evolving history: from Plutarch, writing biographies of ancient Greeks and Romans, to Shakespeare, dramatizing lives through tragedy and comedy, to Dr. Samuel Johnson, becoming the father of modern biography, to Virginia Woolf, providing a rich and clever satire of the genre in her acclaimed mock biography, "Orlando." This very short list hardly begins to illuminate the genre, but it does highlight some of its changes through the centuries.

Just as this unit employs mentor texts to support students' learning, there are texts to support the development of this narrative. To understand the design and purpose of biography, it seems important to study different approaches that demonstrate what the genre seeks to show. Although each individual biography takes its own path, the universal idea is to show the character of its subject. What does character mean? How much is shared to illustrate character and how much is held back? Where does the biographer draw the line? Is it even possible to "tell all", as some modern biographies profess to do? The readers (and author, for that matter) are interested in the character of the subject, the choices he or she made and the life events that formed them. What makes us want to know them more completely? There is a greatness of some sort that draws us in, often because these are extraordinary people, but sometimes because they are just ordinary.

What is meant by character here? It is easy to visualize someone we know as "a character," or imagine a list of "good" or "bad" qualities that we call character traits. Character could be what you are when no one is looking - is it different when others see your choices? Oliver Cromwell famously asked to be painted with "warts and all," perhaps to communicate who he was, but subjects of biography rarely have the opportunity to shape their substance. Many biographies are written posthumously, obviously leaving the subject with no involvement. Winston Churchill once remarked that "History will treat me kindly, because I propose to write it." He did in fact write thousands of pages, but he realized late in life that he might not have had the control that he had planned. An unflattering official portrait, one he truly disliked, showed him as an old man, not the strong fearless "bulldog who'd faced down Hitler." ⁴ His wife disposed of the portrait by burning it, and Churchill recognized that he ultimately had no power over how biographers might choose to represent him.

Biographers determine the frame through which they identify their subject. Robert Caro is chronicling the life of Lyndon Baines Johnson in a multi-volume series. The four volumes (soon to be five) each focus on a formative period of LBJ's life, detailing his early life, his education, and his political career. In volume two, *Means of Ascent*, Caro shows LBJ as a bit of a scheming opportunist as well as a visionary for civil rights. In 1999 during a round table interview with Kurt Vonnegut for the literary magazine *Hampton Shorts*, Caro said: "I

was never interested in writing biography just to show the life of a great man." He wanted instead "to use biography as a means of illuminating the times and the great forces that shape the times—particularly political power." ⁵

Time and space are malleable components for biographers. Virginia Woolf uses them masterfully in her novel *Orlando*. Her protagonist, incredibly, lives for centuries. Woolf begins and ends her story with Orlando sitting quietly on a hill, under a large oak tree, from which "nineteen English counties can be seen beneath; and on clear days, thirty or perhaps forty, if the weather was very fine." ⁶ Orlando returns to the oak tree several times during three and a half centuries without visibly aging. In addition to manipulating time and space, Woolf challenged other biographical conventions, including having her character change from a man to a woman. She poked fun at the stuffiness of the genre, depicting the life and times of a prominent person in a multivolume, chronological, tedious biography. She playfully shows that a biographer sometimes needs to compress time, to control the calendar, and not focus equally on all times of the subject's life. She writes,

After November, comes December. Then January, February, March, and April. After April comes May. June, July, August follow. Next is September. Then October, and so, behold, here we are back at November again, with a whole year accomplished. This method of writing biography, though it has its merits, is a little bare, perhaps, and the reader, if we go on with it, may complain that he could recite the calendar for himself and so save his pocket whatever sum the publisher may think it proper to charge for the book. ⁷

Principles of Biography

Identity from History

There is no such thing as a life lived isolation. ⁸ Although Virginia Woolf satirized the idea of time and space, she illustrated the biographer's job to place its subject in history and provide a context for the readers. Woolf further explains the difficulty with writing a memoir when she says of her own life: "I see myself in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream." Biographers have a responsibility to zoom in on the fish but also to zoom out and describe the stream. ⁹ How can we understand a life without knowing the conventions, constraints, and circumstances of the time and place of the subject? Historical context provides a truer representation than we as readers can project from our current standards and perspectives.

Selection

Biographers have the gift (or curse) of choosing what to include from their subject's life. Because it is quite impossible to cover each and every event of a life, selecting for significance is critical. The question seems to be what to leave out. Biographies cannot be vacuum cleaners so, to be effective, the biographer must have a debate with himself regarding what to include, and how blunt to be. If the subject is living and you are in a position to interview and ask questions, what questions should they be? Are embarrassing events in the life of the subject to be included? These are choices John Lewis Gaddis made as he wrote *George Kennan: An American Life*, showing Kennan's brilliance as a great architect of the Cold War strategy of containment, but also his imperfections as a human being.

Subjectivity

Because a biographer is a person making choices about how and what to write about another person, subjectivity is inevitable. There is no such thing as objectivity here. It is quite unlikely that two different authors would approach the same subject from the exact same point of view. Who we are as writers affects how we present our material. To what extent does where we come from define each of us? We are products of our environment just as are the subjects of a biography. Do the biographer's race, gender, and history determine a perspective? Many examples of this idea appear on the shelves of the libraries and book stores - biographies of a single subject viewed from a perspective, the author's.

Sources

What separates biography from fiction? Although both can, and should be, riveting, engaging stories with moving plots, evolving characters and interesting settings, fiction comes from a great imagination. Biography comes from archives, the paper trail left behind, the figurative bones of a person's life. These bones, these skeletal remains, are the starting place, providing something that is suggestive of the person, likely not the complete picture. Think of experiencing a Picasso painting. He creates an image using shapes that make us think of a face, a body, possibly even an emotion. We work a bit to find the person within the art and eventually someone is revealed to us.

Authors are drawn to research and write biographies about specific people for their own reasons. What might inspire one to write about the life of another? In the Pulitzer Prize winning biography, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard*, history professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich tells the story of the Hallowell, Maine midwife and healer and her work from 1785 to 1812. Ulrich artfully puts flesh on bones as she crafts this biography. She uses Ballard's ledger-style entries to provide us not only a portrait of Martha but also of her society - the medical practices, religious standards, and family circumstances of that time and place. Was Ulrich's motivation just Martha's story, or was there a broader goal?

Audience

It is the biographer's responsibility to be fair and truthful in representing his or her subject to an audience. Biographers spend a great deal of time sifting through archives and records to discover information on their subject. There may be extensive archives that are comprehensive and complete, as in the case of a figure such as LBJ. It may be the case that limited information remains, as in the simple, straight-forward diary of Martha Ballard. This information is then formed into the narrative of a life, based on that evidence. *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography* by Chester Brown is a visual look into the life and death of the 19th century Canadian revolutionary. Although Brown presents his subject in a comic-strip format, his information is heavily researched and extensively footnoted. He has drawn and written his "narrative" and been fair and truthful to his audience.

Autobiography

Autobiography has its roots in Ancient Greece with Xenophon, who wrote the story of his part in the grand campaign to seize the throne of Persia in 400 B.C. Writing this memoir thirty years later, he chose to write in the third person, not how we commonly think of autobiography or memoir. It was, in its time, a runaway hit. Johnson argued that "the most truthful life-writing is when the writer tells his own story since only he knows the whole truth about himself." ¹⁰ Fast-forward to the current day, when autobiography and memoir have become best sellers, not unlike Xenophon's. Many are well-known political figures, sports icons or stars in the entertainment world. They have grand stories to tell about big, exciting moments and events. But doesn't everyone have a story to tell, or many stories for that matter?

Lucy Calkins uses the phrase, "making memoir out of the pieces of our lives" when she discusses students writing autobiography. In her ground-breaking book, *The Art of Teaching Writing*, she quotes Virginia Woolf on this subject: "A memoir is not what happens, but the person to whom things happen." ¹¹ Calkins suggests that the "pieces," the things that happens, are the narratives that are developed and shaped into autobiography. For young student authors, these pieces are the small moments in their lives that become their stories.

Strategies/Methods

Author Studies

Author Studies is an approach that allows students to become immersed in the writings of one author and to begin to become an "expert" on him or her. Getting to know the author in this way is effective in helping students build connections and in recognizing recurring themes. By reading a collection of books by one author at a time, students practice the skills of inference and evaluation while experiencing the sheer joy of reading great stories.

Writer's Workshop

Writer's Workshop is an instructional model that embraces writing as an ongoing process, with students following a set of procedures for planning, drafting, revising, editing, and ultimately, publishing their work. Students in one classroom are likely to be at various stages of this writing process at any one time. The collaboration with peers and teachers is an integral component of this model, with the writing focused primarily on what the children want to communicate as opposed to responding to prompts determined by the curriculum. Student choice, hence, is important.

The Writer's Workshop model includes a component called the mini-lesson, a forum for making a suggestion to the whole class – raising a concern, exploring an issue, modeling a technique, reinforcing a strategy. They often look like miniature speeches, or brief lectures, but they are actually focused on context. This curriculum unit will be centered on the craft of writing about a small moment, otherwise known as zooming in. With the mentor texts as guides, the mini-lessons will offer insight into how to approach, create, edit and revise, and publish the various autobiographical moments the students choose to share.

Once all students have completed one autobiographical small moment picture book, the class will celebrate with a publishing event. This is a culminating component of the workshop model and offers each student a chance to publicly share their work, possibly with another class, with parents, with administrators, with former teachers, but certainly with each other. The students will help to determine the audience.

Art as a Way into Biography

The use of images, particularly portraits, provides for students a kind of launching pad. What can be determined and supposed about character through images? Art Authority is an app for iPads that brings the museums and galleries from around the world right into your classroom. It provides an extensive, varied supply of artwork that otherwise would be unseen by many. This creates a tremendous opportunity for students to use art, specifically portraiture, to think about character. Paintings of people known or unknown can be projected onto a screen, prompting students to think about the subject and to consider the questions of who, what, where and when. Viewing portraits can spark conversation and generate vocabulary that enriches not only the environment (classroom) but begins to find its way into the students' writing, a particular goal for this curriculum unit.

Mentor Texts

Throughout this unit, the students will engage in learning the skill of writing stories about themselves through examples by published authors. Several mentor texts by two children's authors will be highlighted to demonstrate the idea of taking a "small moment" in their lives and building a book or chapter around that moment. The texts and authors selected offer a variety of perspectives, and show that a simple experience is not that simple after all.

Patricia Palacco tells warm family tales drawn from her own childhood among an extended immigrant family of grandparents and cousins. She was born in Lansing, Michigan in 1944. Her family is of Ukranian and Russian descent on one side and Irish on the other. The early years of her life were spent on her grandmother's farm in Union City, Michigan, the setting for many of her stories. Although Polacco's grandmother died when Patricia was only five, Babushka (grandmother in Russian) appears in many of her books. Because her parents were divorced, Patricia and her brother moved back and forth between their parents' homes, spending the school year in Florida with their mother and the summers on the farm in Michigan with their father and his parents. These family experiences certainly influenced Patricia's life and work. In almost every one of her books, Patricia writes about a very young person interacting with an elderly person.

Patricia had great difficulty in school and did not learn to read until she was fourteen after one of her junior high school teachers discovered that she had dyslexia. Because reading was difficult, Patricia found expression through art and ultimately went to college, majoring in Fine Arts, continued through a graduate degree, and finally earned a Ph.D in Art History. For a time after college, Patricia restored ancient pieces of art for museums. As a mother of two, she devoted much of her time to their upbringing and education. Patricia's own words describe how she became a children's author of almost 60 books:

I did not start writing children's books until I was 41 years old. Mind you the "art" has always been there for me most of my life. Apparently one of the symptoms of my disability in academics is the ability of draw very, very well. So drawing, painting and sculpture has always been a part of my life even before I started illustrating my books. The books were quite a surprise, really. Mind you, I came from a family of incredible storytellers. When you are raised on HEARING stories.....NOT SEEING THEM, you become very good at telling stories yourself. ¹²

Some of Polacco's stories and books to share with students include:

Thunder Cake - Thunder Cake is the story of how Patricia conquered her childhood fear of Michigan thunderstorms with the help of her grandmother. By encouraging the young Patricia to ignore the approaching storm, the grandmother has the two wander outside to gather the ingredients for Thunder Cake, the perfect recipe for a rainy day.

Some Birthday - The entire family has forgotten Patricia's birthday. And to make matters worse, Dad has proposed an evening trip to the Clay Pit at the edge of town, one of the scariest places on earth.

Thank You, Mr. Falker - This story honors the teacher that took time to see a child that was struggling and needed help. Patricia was a dyslexic and had difficulty trying to learn along with the other students.

My Rotten, Red-Headed, Older Brother - This story shares Polacco's childhood relationship with her brother Richard, and their unending battle to outdo one another.

My Ol' Man - The author tells the story of the summer her father, a lovable, traveling salesman, discovers an ancient rock with mysterious lines that he believes to be magic. Da shows it to young Patricia and her brother, Ritchie, who seem convinced of the rock's powers as well. When their father is fired from his job, Ritchie is sure that the rock will help them; in its own way it does.

Tomie dePaola shares simple life experiences from his childhood in his work. His extended Irish and Italian family serves as a rich foundation for dePaola's storytelling style. Tomie was born on September 15, 1934 in Meriden, Connecticut. He grew up there with his father and mother, Joseph and Florence, and his brother and sisters, Joseph, Judie and Maureen. His parents and siblings are consistently featured in his memoirs, with many very specific adventures recounted in great detail. At the age of four, Tomie told anyone who would listen that he wanted to write stories and draw pictures for books and to sing and tap dance on the stage when he grew up. Tomie developed a love for books at an early age, probably because his mother loved books and read to Tomie every day as he shares in his comments during an interview with Reading Rockets on PBS:

My mother, she was an avid reader. In fact, my earliest memories of my childhood are my older brother; he was four years older, he was off in school, I would be home, and my mother to calm me down, because I was a very active child, I didn't like children, I liked to be with grownups, and my mother took me to the movies at an early, early age, because she'd go in the afternoon when it was cheaper and I got in free, because I was under five. But every day my mother would read to me. And she wouldn't, we didn't have books like we have now. I didn't have the books like the books I make. And maybe that's why I love making the books I make is because I wish I had had them when I was a child. But we had lots of legends and folktales. And I especially loved the Greek myths. I loved all those, you know, people with wings on their feet and horses that flew. ¹³

Tomie attended Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, received a degree in Fine Arts, and continued his education at The California College of Arts and Crafts. At different times, Tomie has designed posters, greeting cards, and stage sets. He painted church murals and taught art, too. Now, though, he writes and illustrates children's books and paints pictures for galleries. Tomie has now illustrated nearly 250 books and written the stories for over 100 of those books.

Included in the many choices of autobiographical stories are the eight books in his chapter series based on his childhood years from 1938 - 1942 in Meriden, Connecticut. He chronicles his memories and experiences from

nursery school through second grade.

26 Fairmount Avenue Here We All Are On My Way What A Year Things Will Never Be The Same I'm Still Scared (The War Years) Why? (The War Years) For the Duration (The War Years)

The picture book selections from his work are many, and this list identifies a few slice-of-family-life choices that demonstrate examples of writing about a small moment in time.

Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs - This is the story of Tommy as a 4-year-old boy and his close relationship with his 94-year-old great-grandmother. He loves visiting the home of his grandmother, Nana Downstairs, and his great-grandmother, Nana Upstairs. But one day Tommy's mother tells him Nana Upstairs won't be there anymore, and Tommy must struggle with saying good-bye to someone he loves.

The Art Lesson - Tommy knows he wants to be an artist when he grows up. He can't wait to get to school and have real art lessons. When Tommy gets to school and finds out that the art lessons are full of "rules", he is surprised and dismayed.

Tom - The story tells of the close relationship between Tommy and his namesake grandfather, Tom. They read the comics together, act out poems and make up stories, and play practical jokes.

The Baby Sister - Tommy's so excited that his mom is having a baby, and he asks her for a baby sister with a red ribbon in her hair. But he didn't ask for stern Nana Fall-River to come while his mom is in the hospital. Tommy and Nana don't get along very well, but when little Maureen is born, all the trouble is forgotten.

Stagestruck - Tommy's first grade class is putting on a play of Peter Rabbit and he wants the starring role. But, since Tommy talks too much in class, his teacher decides that he should play Mopsy instead.

Classroom Activities

Developing ideas collaboratively, planning writing projects before executing them, and learning to compose narrative related to a specific topic are important skills for students to master. This series of lessons teaches these skills while drawing from the lives of second grade students who will write and publish autobiographies based on personal photographs. The lessons begin with the students working at home with their families to select and record relevant information about photos. Students then work in small groups and independently to create their autobiographies presented as a series.

Throughout the unit, the students will work toward the following objectives:

engage their families in the learning process by working at home to select photographs that represent aspects of their lives; formulate ideas for an autobiography series by working collaboratively and independently; practice their writing skills by composing narrative using themselves as subject matter and revising the composed sentences into a story; participate in a literacy community by reading their stories aloud in small groups.

Each lesson that follows is part of the daily Writer's Workshop. The duration of the lessons depends on the classroom environment. Lessons are structured to be taught in a whole group format in the range of 15 minutes to as long as 45 minutes but, of course, the classroom schedule for each day will determine the actual scope. A similar list of materials for are needed all lessons and these general tools should be available throughout the writing process. Teachers will need chart paper, markers, projector and computer (for Art Authority), workshop tracking charts. Students will need their work folders, a variety of paper choices, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, paints, scissors, bookbinding options such as cardstock and cardboard, yarn, string, ribbon.

Opening Lessons

1. Art Authority

Introduce Art Authority as a vehicle for discussion and vocabulary generation. Beginning the unit with this app will help the students build confidence to talk about imagined lives and then begin connecting their own experiences to each discussion. Although the portraits that the students view will likely be "persons unknown" to them, ideas will be shared and stories will be crafted. Guide the students to think and to talk about who is in the portrait, where they might be and what could be on the subject's mind. Opinions and ideas are valid since there really is no right answer without the benefit of background information. Depending on the portrait, the identity of the subject may eventually be discovered, but this is certainly not necessary or possible in some cases. A compilation of vocabulary and ideas are drafted on a chart for reference in the classroom as the unit progresses.

This exercise of viewing portraits serves a two-fold job. First, because students will be illustrating their own books, the opportunity to experience fine art pieces will inspire their own art work. A second advantage is simply the idea of telling a story, creating a moment for the subject of the painting which will pave a path for the students to begin thinking creatively about their own small moments.

2. Personal Photos

After using fine art to build comfort in and vocabulary for discussion of biography and autobiography, remind students of the photos they have brought in from home and tell them that they will use these photos to give them ideas for their autobiographies. Share some photographs of yourself. Model the discussion you want them to have in their small groups of three or four by talking about what is happening in each photo and why it is important to you.

For example:

"In this photograph I am _____."

"One thing I like about this photograph is _____."

"This photograph was taken _____." (Provide both time and place)

"_____ are in this photograph." (Talk about the people or things that are in the picture)

"I picked this photograph because _____."

3. Mentor texts

Plan to read the selection of mentor texts focusing on one author at a time as the unit begins. There are 10 suggested picture books to use as models which would be roughly two weeks of reading, one week per author. After each text is read, generate a classroom chart, a visual tool for use during the writing process that records the students' thoughts and "noticings" about each particular story. The students will begin to see that characters (family members) continue to appear in each author's series of stories and some of the behaviors and conversations begin to be predictable by the students. An example of what might be useful to the students follows:

Mentor Text Title

Characters	Setting(s)	Actions

Building Lessons

These mini-lessons are examples of where to begin to build students' knowledge as they draft their autobiographies. Because the students have spent time with the mentor texts and have built a foundation of understanding, they will be prepared to discuss sections of the books that highlight a particular skill or strategy through the 15-20 minute mini-lesson. As with most Writer's Workshop sessions, a majority of the time should be for students, pencils and paper in hand, writing and creating. Send the students off to do their own work once the mini-lesson has been presented and after a quick discussion on questions like "How will this look in your work?" "What did this author do that has helped you with your thinking?" "Let's use this new way of describing our writing to talk about our work."

1. *Create small moment - The Art Lesson*

The title itself suggests a small moment - one lesson. Although dePaola sets the tone by including some background information on his classroom and teacher, he doesn't explain everything that happens in kindergarten. He uses his early love of art to share about a small moment - how important it is to him that he gets to choose what he wants to draw after he finishes his assignments. This idea of choice is embedded in the writer's workshop model, a great connection for the students.

Students can use this strategy as they review their photographs and think about how they arrived at that particular moment when the picture was taken. This is an opportunity for a "turn and talk," students literally turning and talking about their photograph and possible writing plans for 2-3 minutes. This is a pre-writing strategy that helps students jump-start their work.

2. *Zooming in - Some Birthday*

Narrowing the focus writing detail about an event requires the writer to use elaboration.

Although this story covers one day, the majority of the text covers just the evening events, the actual celebration of Patricia's birthday at the Clay Pit Bottoms. Have the students retell the story while "picture-

walking" through the book. Reread the section that covers in specific detail, the events at the cookout to show the zooming-in the Palocco uses to build excitement and show importance.

3. Compressing time - Tom

This book shares a collection of little stories, sort of vignettes. It jumps around a bit from story to story but leaves out the details of what happens in between. As a writer, dePaola is compressing time (the non-interesting events) to spend more on what is important, his relationship with his grandfather. The memories of his grandfather are events that happened at some point when Tomie was a child, likely not in any particular sequence.

Students may use this model to write about one of their photographs. Share an example of a photograph of an adventure at SeaWorld, for example, and demonstrate the idea giving every part of the story equal time. Do we need to start the story of the adventure with walking out of the house, locking the door, putting our suitcases in the car, driving to the airport, parking the car, finding the airline terminal. As exciting as that might be if it was the first flight for the student, it is not the goal of the story. The story would be the events at the destination. Compressing time might sound like this, "As our plane landed in Florida, I couldn't believe our three-day adventure was about to begin. We are finally here! Off to SeaWorld we go!" The list of boring activities can now be inferred and the majority of the text can now be devoted to the adventures.

4. Selection / Revision - My Rotten, Red-Headed, Older Brother

Patricia Polacco makes choices about how she would like to us to know her brother. She has selected certain behavior and events that give us a truthful and fair perspective of Ritchie, sharing the bad and, ultimately the good. She demonstrates the depth of her relationship with her brother, through the text, the illustrations, and the real family photographs that she includes, not only of her and her brother as children but through the years into adulthood. Share with students the reasons for the choices and how it helps us as readers know both Patricia and her brother more fully. What choices can you make as you write about yourself and family members? How does Patricia model help you think differently? Are there things you think that she left out on purpose and why?

Closing Lessons

1. Students will write a letter to either or both authors. Their goal is to share their response to the books we've read and how they have served as a model and inspiration for creating our own series. A series of mini-lessons on letter writing can be embedded in this unit if students have not yet mastered the format. Certainly, an overview, reminders and examples of good letter-writing practice are important as this is not just a classroom exercise - the students will be sending the letters and samples of their work at some point during the school year.

2. Students will continue to create additional books to add to their series. Writer's workshop is an open, learning environment and, as student choice is integral to the structure, the opportunity to write and illustrate small moments in picture book form will continue throughout the year.

Endnotes

¹ Hermoine Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, 5.

² Lee, 5-6.

³ Lee, 18.

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 138.

⁵ <http://www.robertcaro.com/articles-profiles/interview-with-kurt-vonnegut/>

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, 14.

⁷ Woolf, 184.

⁸ Lee, 13.

⁹ Lee, 14.

¹⁰ Lee, 47.

¹¹ Lucy McCormick Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Writing*, 401.

¹² <http://www.patriciapolacco.com/author/bio/bio.html>.

¹³ <http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/depaola/>

Resources

Allen, JoBeth, Vinette Fabregas, Karen Hale Hankins, Gregory Hull, Linda Labbo, Hattie Spruill Lawson, Barabara Michalove et al. "PhOLKS Lore: Learning from Photographs, Families, and Children." *Language Arts* 79, no. 4 (2002): 312-22.

The authors confirm that when students write narratives about their own lives it helps them develop personal, social, and cultural connections.

Augustine, Saint. *Confessions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Noted as the first Western autobiography, St. Augustine recounts his life from sinful youth to his conversion to Christianity

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

Lucy Calkins has provides a definitive writing resource for teacher of primary and middle school students. She characterizes how to create a positive, writing environment with the writing workshop model.

Caro, Robert A.. *Means of Ascent*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

This second in the biographical series covering Lyndon Baines Johnson's life covers the highly-contested 1948 senatorial election in Texas.

Elleman, Barbara. *Tomie dePaola: His Art & His Stories*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999.

Although Tomie dePaola presents much of his life in his autobiographical work, Elleman gives a biographer's view of the artist and storyteller's life, sharing his influences, interests, and work across several genre.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

An incredibly helpful and accessible text with chapters discussing the ways historians and biographers write using the tools of time, space and scale.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *George F. Kennan: An American Life*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.

This is a grand biography of the complex Cold War diplomat and ambassador who, as Gaddis shows, was both brilliant and flawed.

Leal, Dorothy J. "Digging up the past, building the future: Using book authoring to discover and showcase a community's history." *The Reading Teacher* 57, no. 1 (2003): 56-60.

This article discusses how autobiographical writing offers teachers a way to engage students and their families in literacy learning, creating a willingness to participate in literacy activities.

Lee, Hermione. *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Lee, a master biographer, gives a remarkable look at the genre, providing insight into types of biographies as well as strategies, ethics and principles biographers use in their work.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando: A Biography*. London: Penguin, 2000

A fictional biography whose subject in the beginning is a sixteen-year-old boy in the Elizabethan era and in the end, three hundred years later, is a thirty-six-year-old woman. This is a marvelous and entertaining example of the manipulation of time and space.

Websites

<http://www.patriciapolacco.com/author/bio/bio.html>

<http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/depaola/>

<http://www.robertcaro.com/articles-profiles/interview-with-kurt-vonnegut/>

Appendix - Implementing District Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.2 Recount stories and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

Students will retell events in their own lives as they craft their small moment narratives in picture book format, explaining why they chose these experiences to write about and why they want to share them with others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

Students will use the art work of Patricia Polacco and Tomie dePaola to demonstrate understanding of the autobiographical picture books created by each author. Using photographs from home and school, as well as illustrations of their own, students will be creating their own texts that will include characters, plot, and setting.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.3 Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

As students create their own autobiographical picture books series, they will demonstrate the skill of writing a well-elaborated event that includes details of their personal experiences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.5 With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

During Writer's Workshop, the students will draft, revise, and edit their autobiographies as they develop their writing skills. Teachers will conference individually on a regular basis to guide and advise and students will engage in peer editing to support each other.

Appendix - Home/School Connection

Prior to beginning the Writer's Workshop unit, the following two documents should be sent home to families.

Note to Families

Dear Families,

We will begin working on an autobiography writing project soon. Each child will write a series of stories about his or her own life. We would like you to help us begin the project by doing the things described in this letter at home with your child.

1. To inspire your child's project, we are requesting personal photographs be sent to school. It would be most helpful if you could send in photographs that "tell a story" about your child. The autobiography series will be

all about him or her, so it would be best if your child appears in the photograph somewhere. Ideas for photos:

- Other people with your child (family or friends)
- Your child doing something (playing baseball or dancing)
- Photos of your child in a special place he or she has visited
- Your child with a favorite object (a toy or book)

2. Write your child's name on the back of all the photographs and indicate one of the following:

- KEEP = we may keep the photo and use as sent in
- RETURN = we will reproduce the photo and return the original to you

3. After the photographs of your child have been selected, take time to talk about them. Share information about what is happening in the photos. Point out details.

4. Number the photographs. Work together with your child to complete the *An Autobiography: Information About My Photos* sheet. This will help your child write about the photos at school.

5. Send four photographs and the information sheet to school with your child by _____.

An Autobiography: Information about My Photos

Directions: First, label the photographs on the back 1-4. Second, together write details about each photo in the corresponding boxes below. Try to answer who? what? where? when? why? and how?

Photo #1	Photo #2
Photo #3	Photo #4

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