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Will They Remember Me? Finding Our Identity by Writing Memoirs and Biographies

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Introduction

At some point during the first week of school I present a questionnaire to my new sixth grade students. I enjoy using this tool as a simple way for me to get to know their likes, dislikes and some other basic background information about who they are. I'll ask about their birthday, how many siblings they have, what their favorite and least favorite class is at school, whether they have access to a computer, etc. Questions that I recently added to the questionnaire are whether they have their own email (if so list) and if they use social media and what type. 90% of my students claimed they have an email address as well as a Facebook and/or Twitter account. My students informed me that the new form of social media is an application on your phone called Instagram. I asked my student Nick to show me his Instagram and Twitter account and to explain what the purpose was for these two forms of social media since I didn't quite comprehend that. According to Nick, Instagram is an application that will allow you to take a picture with your mobile device, photo-shop the picture to a certain extent then post for your followers to see. If the photo receives enough 'likes' or comments by other people, it gets featured on the main page. These photos can also be linked to your Facebook and Twitter account so that the people on those sites can see the photo as well. Nick said the purpose of Twitter was a way to share your thoughts/feelings with your followers any time you want. A red flag went off in my head about the possibility that this site can be an unsafe environment. I continue the conversation with Nick about the various social media sites:

"Well, what do you mean by followers?"

"Followers can be your friends, celebrities or bands, or other people that have cool blogs or just seem interesting. You are following them to see what they post; this can be thoughts they have, pictures, songs, videos."

"So there are people you follow or allow to follow your posts that you don't know?"

"Yeah...sometimes. Most of the people I follow though are my friends at school."

"What about your parents?"

Nick laughs, "My mom has no idea how to use Twitter or Instagram. I'm lucky if she can turn on the laptop."

This is a huge problem in regards to my students using social media. They do not realize that these statements or pictures posted are permanent; these postings may not have an immediate effect on their lives, but it can have an effect on their future. Later in the school year, we had an issue with a student bullying another through the means of Instagram later in the school year. The bully would post degrading photos of their target with the intention of causing harm and embarrassment since the bully was aware that anyone who was friends with either her or the victim could read as well as comment on what was posted. The bully went as far as to post the comment "I'll keep posting mean, horrible comments and pictures until you commit suicide." This comment was linked not only to the student's Instagram, but Twitter and Facebook accounts. The school took action and the bully was suspended from school; the bully also lost her chance of remaining in at Conrad for next school year. She will also not be allowed to reapply for our high school program. Further, the bully may not now realize the staying power of her comments now. Since these photos and comments can be accessible through the Internet, she has already created a negative identity for herself that will allow for others such as high schools, colleges and other students to think negatively of her. Clearly, many students are not being conscious of the pictures or statements they are leaving behind for others to see.

Looking at this unfortunate incident, I want to teach my sixth grade students the power of identity and reflection. I want them to reflect upon who they are as individuals and consider what image or character they want to leave behind. In this unit, students will be writing a memoir where they will reflect on an incident that has changed them. Next, the students will become biographers in writing a peer's biography and reflecting on how this person's incident can be reinforced as a positive lesson for future generations to learn. Finally, the subject of the biography will reflect and work with their peer to write a memoir discussing their identity and what they truly want to be remembered by in the years to come.

Rationale

Over the last several years of teaching sixth grade English/Language Arts, I have found a deficit in my students' writing abilities. At the elementary level, I often hear that teaching writing is placed on the backburner since the elementary teachers are required to first teach the reading and math programs and initiatives mandated by the state. Also, since our current state test is only multiple-choice, reading on grade level was more of a focus than teaching the elements of writing. Each year, my students struggle when writing a narrative or informational piece that is cohesive with a beginning, middle and end and can smoothly transition from one thought to the next all the while maintaining a clear purpose. Another major deficit is that the students are not thinking logically and are not being safe or using good judgment about what they are leaving behind for other people to see. Their private lives are being made available to the public realm through the Internet and they need to reflect on what they truly want other people to see. With this unit, I want my students to learn the writing process by writing their own memoirs and biographies of their peers. Students will act as authors as well as editors by collaborating in working together in writing, editing and revising their memoirs and biographies. Also, to learn to reflect on what to share with others, students will write their memoir about an incident that has changed them. They will choose an event that will help their audience learn from their mistakes.

To help students learn to reflect on an author's purpose as well learn to write their own memoir, we will be

using Dan Greenburg's personal narrative entitled "My Superpowers" to act as our model. Dan Greenburg is a young adult author who shares about the time he was bullied as a young teenager by a group of boys from his school. At this point in his life, Greenburg wished he had superpowers like Superman to handle those bullies; instead of the superpowers coming through, Greenburg lashed out at the boys and it made him look like a crazy person. In the end, Greenburg learned that the only way he can be saved is if he accepts himself for who he is as a person. Greenburg wrote this event so that his young audience can learn from his experiences.

Students will also read and examine the biography "Matthew Henson on Top of the World" written by Jim Haskins This biography discusses the life story of Matthew Henson, an African-American that was a part of the expedition that discovered the North Pole. Henson demonstrates a strong character in that he pursued and succeeds in his goals even though he became an orphan at a young age and had to deal with prejudice due to the color of his skin. Students will read the biography to learn about the principles of biography as well as use as a model to write their biographies about their peers.

Demographics

I currently teach sixth grade English/Language Arts at Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) in Red Clay School District located in Wilmington, Delaware; the school hosts sixth through twelfth grades. CSS is considered a magnet school in which our high school programs focus on mathematics and science pathways. The various pathways offered are in Allied Health, Biotechnology, and the newest pathway of Engineering. The middle school program follows the norms and requirements of a typical middle school setting in the Red Clay School District. We operate on a block schedule; I see my sixth grade students on a daily basis for 88 minutes. The students I have in my class range from high to low academic ability level based on the previous year's test results and classroom created assessments. For example, in the fall of 2012 64% of our students were proficient in reading according to the state standards. By the end of the school year we needed 86% of our students to be proficient and passing the state test.

Also, I also teach special-education students in sixth grade as well as in the high school setting using the inclusion model established in the Red Clay Consolidated School District. At CSS, students classified with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) are placed in an 'A setting' which is considered to be the least-restrictive educational setting. This means special-education students are mainstreamed and attending classes with students that are considered regular education students. This past year was the first year we followed the team-teaching model. Following this model, I was required to push-in as the special-education teacher into an eighth grade English/Language Arts class and would co-teach a ninth grade English Literature class. However, for my sixth grade English/Language Arts classes I would have both special-education students and regular education students in the same class; I was the only active teacher in that classroom. Due to this I had to differentiate instruction based on the various ranges of academic needs of my students.

The unit was designed to fit into the block schedule and targets all ability levels and various multiple intelligence spectrums so that instruction can be differentiated based on the ranges of student ability level in the classroom.

Essential Understanding

- Students will learn the process of writing a narrative by examining models and writing their own memoirs and biographies
- Students will act as editor and read and compare one author's interpretation of than event written in first person point of view (student's memoir) to the same event written in third person's point of view (student's biography).
- Students will read an analyze a text to determine the author's purpose for writing and generate real-world connections

Content

In her book *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Hermione Lee states: "Biography's job is to get behind the public performance and show us the real person at home." ¹ Lee goes on to say that biography is the narrative of someone's life and that there are ten rules on biography writing. However, in the tenth and final rule, she states there are no rules for biography. "There is a lingering idea of biography as the complete true story of a human being, the last word on life. But if it is, rather a mixed, unstable, genre, whose rules keep coming undone, then perhaps the only rule that holds good is that there is no such thing as a definitive biography." ² Well if there are no rules on how to create or write a biography, then what exactly is biography?

Nigel Hamilton wrote *How to Do Biography*, which provides helpful tips to those who want to pursue life-writing. Hamilton suggests that before you delve into the task of writing a biography, or even your own story in an autobiography or memoir, you must first understand the history behind this interesting, but at times controversial genre.

History of Biographies

Dr. Samuel Johnson, identified as the "father" of the modern biography, in 1750 defined the genre as "...was the recording and evaluating of people's moral character...how in facing the vicissitudes of life, an individual did or didn't cope was or was not tempted into sin, felt or did not feel remorse." ³ However, Dr. Johnson's outlook on biography took time to accomplish. In 1888 *The Oxford English Dictionary* defined biography was simply the history of men's lives describing the events in chronological order from birth until death. Particularly, the biography would only include the accomplishments and achievements of the person in chronological order as stated in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. It would act as monument to that person and all that they had achieved in their lifetime. However, censorship made looking into the private life of the person impossible since the only features of the person that were highlighted was what was seen or what was chosen to be seen in the public realm. In 1928, Virginia Woolf changed the perspective of the genre of biography in writing *Orlando* and ultimately changed the approach and process of creating a biography.

In reading *Orlando*, I thought it was an ordinary narrative about a man named Orlando living in the time of Queen Elizabeth I. After the first couple chapters, the events of the book became odd. Orlando suddenly had a

sex change and Woolf finished the narrative with her main character as a woman. Also, how was it possible for the main character to live for four-hundred years? Apparently, *Orlando* is not a man but is truly a woman. In reality, the book is a biography of Virginia Woolf's lover, Vita Sackville-West. Woolf cleverly poked-fun at the genre of biography, showing that it had become stuffy and too serious; it did not examine the drama or faults of a person that truly allow the audience to empathize with the subject. Woolf also proved that the author has a choice on what to include in order to be creative when writing the life story of someone. Then to define biography, then Hermione Lee states in *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*: "There is a lingering idea of biography as the complete true story of a human being, the last word on life. But if it is, rather a mixed, unstable, genre, whose rules keep coming undone, then perhaps the only rule that holds good is that there is no such thing as a definitive biography." ⁴

Principles of Biography

If there is no set definition of a biography, where do you begin writing about someone's life? Ultimately, there are no rules for writing a biography; however, there are certain conventions and principles to follow when writing someone's life story. In the seminar "The Art of Biography" John Lewis Gaddis identified the five principles of biography:

1. Identify is inseparable from history

Gaddis recommended starting small and looking at their picture or portrait. What do you see included in the picture? What may have been left out? Why was this feature left out? This question process begins to help you narrow your thought process in identifying who the subject may be and what ultimately defines their character.

2. Selecting for significance

As the author, you have to determine what is best to include and what would be okay to leave out. For instance, when writing his biography on George Kennan, Kennan kept diaries and journals of his daily life. When Kennan was older, the same mundane entries would appear in the diaries so rather than bore the reader, Gaddis decided to leave this information out. Within a character or person there are all sorts of different dimensions of their personality. You as the biographer have to be selective and decide which dimensions you want to focus on.

3. Expression requires compression

Compression is where you squeeze certain aspects together to create more space for other, more defining events. This can be said of the approach Gaddis performed when writing his biography about George Kennan. Gaddis choose to be selective and compressed the older years of his life together since the majority of the information Kennan shared in his journals was the same, daily routine. It did not hold enough significance to hinder an entire chapter of the book.

4. Biography as objectivity

When writing a life story, the biographer determines what is important to know about the subject hence what gets written into the biography. They have to keep in mind their audience and what they are interesting in reading which will help decide what direction the author should write in.

5. Should be fair

Again this is where selectiveness comes into play and knowing what your intentions are in writing about someone else's life. Not only does it show the warts and the entire subject, but their family members will be reading. Gaddis arranged it with George Kennan that the book would be published after he died so as not bear the repercussions of his personal misjudgments and affairs. Gaddis also had to keep in mind the living family member's perspective on the publication of their father's life. So the narrative had to tell the truth but be tasteful and sensitive to the audience.

Most importantly, Hermione Lee states, when writing a biography: "Whatever the story is about, whatever race, nationality, sex, class, language or history is involved, there will have to be time, place, character, and events." ⁵ So in other words, the elements of a narrative have to be present since you are telling the story of a life. The beginning and end points, events discussed and timeframe covered can be more flexible and at the author's discretion. This is beneficial in teaching students how to write a narrative since they are using a real-life example by writing about the lives of each other.

Autobiography and Memoir Defined

Autobiography, as Nigel Hamilton writes, is probably the most challenging of all biographical undertakings. But why? How difficult can this be? I mean, you are just writing about yourself. I *am* the best source for writing about my life since I am indeed the one who is living it. But when I read further into Hamilton's book, I quickly reconsidered.

Hamilton defines autobiography as "the relentless record and attempt examination of one's own life: a quest for mental freedom through truthfulness." ⁶ *Autobiography* is where you attempt to write your whole life story. Benjamin Franklin attempted to write his autobiography but had difficulties, especially when remembering all the events from his childhood and teenage years. ⁷ Autobiography is similar to biography in that it may be tedious to write down every detail within your life unless you are dedicated in keeping journals on a daily basis. Memoir is very similar to autobiography, but it is more specific in the selection of evidence. A *memoir* is "the record of a discrete part of it (life), told as a challenge both to oneself in terms of truth-telling, and to the world, in terms of a larger, quasi-political agenda." ⁸ Ultimately, it is the narration of our life defined by our own terms. Rather than focusing on your life as a whole, you focus on parts or certain time frames to justify what you have accomplished or learned. Here's the kicker: in order for you to write a true autobiography or memoir, you must be willing to make your personal information public. And, James Boswell and Dr. Samuel Johnson point out, you cannot only share your achievements and how you managed to accomplish those feats. You must be "willing to show the warts and all." ⁹

For if you fabricate or omit the truth in working within this genre, you lose the trust of your audience and your credibility as a writer. This was the case for James Frey in his attempt to publish *A Million Little Pieces*, a so-called memoir of his 'life' in his struggle against drug addiction. It was the up and coming best-seller and on all of the "must-read" lists in 2003. Frey's book was even listed as a book on Oprah's Book Club. However, the website TheSmokingGun.com exposed the fact that his memoir is mainly fabricated and the news went viral. The revelation of his lies became more sensational than the reasons why Frey decided to make this narrative a memoir (even though originally he told his publisher that it was a work of fiction; the publisher said it would never sell if deemed as such so it was changed into a memoir). Thus, the book was returned and Frey lost millions. What is worse is that he forever damaged his reputation as a writer since he misled and betrayed his audience about his intentions.

So, needless to say, the idea of composing a memoir or autobiography can be daunting and intimidating. "The

work, the passion, as well as the self-exposure, must be done by you along—and for this you will need great courage and storytelling skills." However, reading and writing is a crucial means of self discovery, even self-creation. The process allows for the author to bring new life, a new self into the being. Both works provide a remarkable outlet for reflection and opens pathways into a new self. "So when we read memoir, we among other things, witness and in some sense participate in this marvelous act of self-discovery." ¹⁰

Students Define their Character by Writing Biographies and Memoirs

Winston Churchill, leader of Great Britain during World War II, effectively combined the making and writing of history: "History will treat me kindly...Because I propose to write it." ¹¹ Whether they believe it or not, my students are leaving bits and pieces of history. This could be a Tweet, a picture uploaded to Facebook, a diary entry about the events of their day, a movie stub, or a writing project about the Tablet of Hammurabi completed for their Social Studies class. Though, these pieces or what we can call archives may not actually depict who they are as an individual. Winston Churchill demonstrated this in a unfavorable painting that depicted him of a fat, old man that was commissioned by Parliament. Churchill died leaving instructions for his wife, Clementine, to burn it. Churchill was correct in stating that he can write his own history. My students can take this role as well.

Biography, auto biography and memoir can act as a great benefit to society in its ability to provide insights into human nature, in depicting patterns in behavior that could be useful to help define, interpret and understand the character within the narrative

"Biography is also expected to portray, by implication, how the individual's life connects with more universal aspects of the human condition: the common themes and preoccupations that fascinate us about life—from family to career, from love to wars from childhood to old age and death. Behind the record of an actual individual, there is this a broader, *symbolic* focus that constitutes a work of life-depiction: a focus that resonate with the reader and with his or her interests and concerns." ¹²

In examining human nature, we were asked to define *character*. This was a challenge in that is seems so simple of a term but there are so many variables that can determine the meaning of this word. The general consensus of our seminar is that character is who we are and what we are doing when no one is looking. We try to interpret someone's character through interpretation and observation; using archives of what was written or what we see in a picture or painting. Dr. Samuel Johnson stated that when he is writing a biography that he "was more interested, within in such chronicles, in those episodes and stories that resonated with the reader, and whose lessons could be applied to his or her own life...*applicable* knowledge is Johnson's goal for biography." ¹³

The applicable knowledge that Dr. Samuel Johnson states is the final outcome of my unit. We see now with social media that there is a lack of judgment in the 'archives' or evidence that the students are leaving behind in the world. In learning to write their own memoirs, I want my students to reflect on their own actions to help their audience learn from their mistakes. This in turn can help them ultimately help them reflect on their character and decide how they want to be remembered in the years to come.

Strategies

Collaborative Groups and Clock Partners

Working together with peers is a life skill that students need to practice and accomplish. With collaborative learning, it allows students to learn to work together towards a common goal. Each member of the group is accountable to each other and required to participate in order to achieve the final outcome. Students need to learn how to work respectfully with others and learn how to consider each other's points of views. Collaboration also benefits students in that by listening to their peers they can develop better understanding of the task or content; it also extends their thinking by hearing other perspectives that they may not have considered. Individual and group evaluations are essential to monitor the group's progress working as a team.

Clock Partners

Clock partners is strategy that I use for students to collaborate with at least four different peers in the class. Students are given a worksheet that the face of a clock; the only times that are shown, though, are 12, 3, 6, and 9. By these times, there is a space available for students to place one of their peer's names. The students have to place their name on their peer's clock on the same time. This will make these two students 12 o'clock partners. Students will then find three other peers in the class to fill the other three spots. This ensures that they have four different partners to work and collaborate with. My students pick two of their partners and I will match them up with two other people based on ability level.

For this unit, students will be working with their clock partner (one they chose) to write each other's biographies. This way the students are comfortable writing someone's life story as well as sharing personal information with a person they are already familiar with.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are a visual tool that helps display the relationship amongst facts and ideas. It allows the content to become easier to break down because you are able to categorize related information and it becomes more visually organized and comprehensible. For the unit, we will use graphic organizers in responding to the model texts as well as using as an aid to help with planning and organizing the writing of both their memoir and biography.

Close Reading

Close reading is where students will be exposed to a text three different times. Once, they are expected to read the text in entirety; the other two exposures can be a single line, a passage or reading the text in its entirety again. It depends on the length of text. They read, reread mark, and annotate key passages, word-for-word, sentence-by-sentence, line-by-line. In giving students more exposure to the text, I am allowing them to focus and better engage with the text. We will be using this in reading the model texts "My Superpowers" and "Matthew Henson On Top of the World" as well as a part of the reflection of our writing of our memoirs and biographies.

SOAPSTone

This is a strategy is where students are analyzing the text by discussing and identifying *Speaker*, *Occasion*,

Audience, Purpose, Subject and Tone. This is an acronym to help students interpret the different aspects of the text by identifying these pieces as they read. We will be using this in reading the model texts "My Superpowers" in studying memoir and the biography "Matthew Henson On Top of the World" as well as in our writing of our memoirs and biographies.

Jigsaw

In groups, students will read different texts or passages from a single text then exchange information from their reading with their classmates or members of another group. If working in a group, they will then share out their findings with the original members of the group. This is a good strategy to help create peer collaboration and differentiate instruction for struggling readers. When we are reading the model texts for the first time, each group will look for one aspect of the SOAPSTone and world together to determine that aspect using evidence from the text. Students then will share out with the rest of the class their findings. This chunks the material into smaller parts, making it more accessible, especially for special-education students, since they are only required to look for one trait and not lose meaning of the text by looking for all parts of the SOAPSTone.

Classroom Activities

The unit should take three weeks time, depending on the pace of your students writing and editing. The goal for the final product is for the student's to have a published book of their life written by themselves as well as by their peers. This way they can keep their reflections of themselves and live up to what they want to be remembered for.

Activity One: Reading and Writing Memoirs (5 to 7 days)

Part A: Defining and Reading a Memoir

Essential Questions:

- Is the author's purpose clearly stated?
- What techniques did the author use to catch the readers' attention?

Objectives:

1. Students will cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text using the SOAPSTone model.
2. Determine the author's purpose for writing the text and analyze the reason certain details were included or excluded

Materials: Post-It Poster Board, sticky notes, highlighters/color pencils in blue, green, yellow, pink, orange, and purple

Vocabulary:

- Autobiography- writing about your entire life
- Memoir- writing about a specific frame of time from your life

Before Reading/Do Now: In their journal, students will write about an event that caused change to happen within our society. Give the students examples such as the invention of iPhone or the iPad or the events on September 11, 2001 to help them brainstorm events.

Direct Instruction: Place the definitions of the terms autobiography and memoir on the board and have students copy them in their notebooks. Explain to students that we are going to read a memoir by Dan Greenburg where he discusses an event that happened in his life that caused him to change. We will use this text as our example for writing our own memoirs about an event that has happened in our lives that created change.

During Reading/ Close Reading # 1: Students will reading Dan Greenburg's personal narrative/memoir "My Super Powers". While reading, the students will work in collaborative groups of 3 to 4 students. Each group will be assigned a role in the SOAPSTone strategy to focus on while reading. As they are reading, they need to highlight the evidence in the text to pertain to their role the specified color.

S- Speaker- Blue

O-Occasion- Green

A - Audience -Pink

P- Purpose-Yellow

S- Subject-Orange

T-Tone - Purple

Students will share what they highlighted with the rest of their group and write their peer's responses/answer in the graphic organizer (appendix B). Recreate a larger form of the graphic organizer on the Post-It Poster Board paper.

Students will also write the evidence of their answer on a sticky note (two to three responses) and place them on the larger Post-It Poster Board by their role.

Once everyone has placed their responses on the poster board, students will nominate a speaker for their group and we will discuss their findings as a whole class.

Close Reading # 2: Students will reread paragraphs 1-3 of "My Superpowers" only. Once they finished they will address the following questions:

- What personal event does Greenburg share with us? What tone is he taking?
- How does the author make you feel reading these three paragraphs?

Close Reading # 3: Students will read "My Superpowers" in its entirety once more than address the following questions.

- Why do you think Greenburg picked this particular event to share?
- What lesson do you think Greenburg wanted to teach his audience?
- How can we use this story to change our actions for the future?

I want students to reflect on Greenburg's writing in discussing what he wanted us to learn from this incident and how can we change our actions by learning from someone else's mistakes. This will help them reflect on how we can learn from our behavior which is what I want them to write about as author's of their own memoirs. I want them to write about an event that caused change so the embedded purpose is for their audience to learn from what they experienced.

Part B: Reflecting on the Negative: Writing our Own Memoirs

Essential Questions:

- How do we decide what to write in our memoir?

Objectives:

1. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
2. Produce a clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
3. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

Vocabulary:

- Incident- an individual occurrence or event.

Students will use Dan Greenburg's memoir as a model to write their own memoir about an incident that brought about change, either in their actions or thinking. Requirements of memoir are as follows:

- The memoir will be written as a diary or journal entry
- Will only be one page, front and back in-length.
- Create an interesting title that connects to the narrative being told.
- Incident has to be an event that brought about a significant change
- Has to have a clear beginning, middle and ending
- Author has to reflect in the incident of the event has to be present

The major focus that students have to keep in mind while they are writing is their purpose and what they want their audience to learn. They are trying to teach their audience a lesson through an experience they witnessed so that has to be clearly depicted in their writing. Students will generate a list of events that they are

considering writing about in their notebook (at least three events should be listed). After a ten to fifteen brainstorming session, they will discuss their choices with their 3 o'clock partner to help them decide which is the most attention grabbing event or one that will really impact their audience.

Activity 2: Reading and Writing Biographies (5 to 7 days)

Part A: Reading a Biography

Essential Questions:

- What are the five principles of biography writing?

Vocabulary:

- Biography- the story of someone's life as written by someone else
- Five Principles of Biography

Before Reading/Direct Instruction: Define the Five Principles of Writing a Biography in a Power Point Presentation. The five principles are as follows:

1. Identity is Inseparable from History
2. Selecting from Significance
3. Expression Requires Compression
4. Biography as Objectivity
5. Should Be Fair

Have students copy the principles and explanations in their notebook.

During Reading: Close Read # 1 is where students will listen to the audio-version of the biography "Matthew Henson on Top of the World" from the McDougal/Holt textbook. While they are listening, students are required to write five different "Thinking Notes" as they listen.

After Reading: Individually, students will complete the worksheet finding the five principles within the biography of Matthew Henson (appendix C) with their 12 o'clock partners. For close read # 2, students will reread pages 102 until page 104. Once they have finished reading, they will address the following question

- What artifacts do you think Jim Haskins had to use to write the life story of Matthew Henson, especially this personal information?
- Zoom In on the events surrounding the beginning of Henson's life. Why do you think the author Jim Haskins decided to share these events?
- How did learning about this aspect of Henson's life make you feel about him?

Close read # 3 students will reread 104 - 105 discussing how Henson becomes educated by interacting with Captain Childs while working on the *Katie Hines*. They will also look at the passages on the end of 105 and the

beginning of 106 discussing Robert Perry's background.

- How did this event create change in Matthew Henson's life?
- Why do you think Haskins included this excerpt about Robert Perry's life if this is Matthew Henson's biography?

Students will re read pgs. 108-109 and answer the following question:

- How does learning about Henson's life and accomplishments change the outlook of ours?

Part B: Writing Biographies of Our Peers

Essential Questions:

- How can we apply the principles of biography to our own writing?

Objectives:

1. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
2. Produce a clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
3. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

Students will apply what we learned about biographies to write a biography of their peer. They will be paired with their 3 o'clock partner to write each other's biographies. Requirements of the biographies are as follows:

- Biographies are two to four pages (front and back in-length).
- Needs to include the events from the beginning of their life up until now
- Family background information has to be included
- Needs to include the subject's favorite memory growing up (this can include an object such as toy or person) and what this highlights about the subject's personality.
- Need to include the event from the memoir or the diary entry, description of what they learned and what the audience can learn from this person

The author will complete the Questionnaire for Author to Complete for Biography (Appendix D) to gain more background information about their subject. At the subject's discretion, they can offer two artifacts for the author to examine and write in their biography. After the questionnaires were completed and the author has written their first draft, students will work with their 6 o'clock partners for peer editing purposes. Editors will be given a checklist of items to look for in the author's writing (appendix E)

Activity 3: What Do You Want to be Remembered For?

Objectives:

1. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
2. Produce a clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
3. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

Essential Questions:

- *What do you want to be remembered for?*
- *What actions or events do we want to leave behind that show we were a good person?*

State: "Dan Greenburg wished that he had superpowers to help him deal with his real-life bullies. As we know, superpowers such as flying, super-strength and shooting laser beams with our ideas or spider-webs from our arms are actions only found in comic books and works of fiction. However, there are real-life superpowers known as character traits that we can develop to make us better as a person."

Part A: Present the essential questions to the students and provide a copy of the character traits superpowers chart (appendix F). Tell students to pick the one character trait that they want to develop into their new superpower moving forward with their life. Students will use this superpower/character trait to help determine how they want to be remembered by other people as they move forward with their lives. Students also have to predict ways they will use their new superpower/character trait to create positive change. This will be used as the introduction of their biography for when we have them created into a book.

Part B: Working again with their 3 o'clock partner, the students will zoom out to their 60th birthday and reflect on the events they want to see happen in their life. They want to think of events that reflect or demonstrate them using their new 'superpower' in their life to create positive change. Their 3 o'clock partner will write about their person and these actions from a third person point of view as the conclusion to their book. This will only be one page in length to use to end the book.

Bibliography/Teacher Resources

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Couser, G. Thomas. *Memoir: an introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. A text meant as a resources for teachers that

defines the genre memoir and gives examples to use with various age-levels.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. A description of history, and why someone should take the time to study history, and how the study of history is easily linked to the study of science and mathematics.

Hamilton, Nigel. *How to do biography a primer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. A text defining biography and the various approaches one can take in writing a biography of another person.

Lee, Hermione. *Biography: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Text that defines biography and instructs readers how to approach writing a life story using examples of other famous literary works.

Appendices

Appendix A: Common Core Standards

Reading for Information Text:

- I 6: Determine author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text
- I 9: Compare and Contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another

Writing:

- W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- W4: Produce a clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
- W5: With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

Speaking and Listening:

- S1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners

Appendix B

Role	Answer	Evidence from the text
Speaker		
Occasion		
Audience		
Purpose		
Subject		
Tone		

Appendix C

Principle	Evidence from Text That Shows Principle Was Followed
Identify is Inseparable from History	
Selecting from Significance	
Expression Requires Compression	
Biography as Objectivity	
Should be Fair	

Appendix D

Questionnaire for Author to Complete about Biography

1. Birthday/place of birth
2. Family Members: Dad, Mom, Siblings
3. Brief family history summary (parents' professions, grandparent information, etc.)
4. Favorite foods, drinks, movies, color, etc.
5. Favorite place to visit and why
6. Earliest memory
7. Best day of your live
8. Worse day of your life
9. Pet that held significance to you or the family
10. Something that happened that you considered to be awful or make you angry

Appendix E

List of Character Traits or "Superpowers" students can consider:

Courage	Friendship	Wisdom	Justice
Honesty	Tolerance	Imagination	Equality
Fairness	Citizenship	Self-Discipline	Integrity
Responsibility	Creativity	Caring	Assertiveness
Confidence	Honor	Empathy	Accountability
Respect	Kindness	Restraint	Conservation
Purpose	Sincerity	Sharing	Forgiveness
Truthfulness	Loyalty	Cooperation	Compassion

Appendix F

Questionnaire to help them think about their future:

- Define the trait you picked
- Explain why you picked this particular trait or "superpower" to represent you
- Moving forwards with your life, predict how your actions going to reflect this trait
- What do you want to see happen in your future?
- What high school do you think you will go to?
- Do you see yourself going to college? If so, what will be your major/degree?
- What will your profession be?
- Do you want a family?
- Where do you think you will live later in life?

Notes

1. Hermione Lee *Biography: A Short Introduction*, pg. 102
 2. Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Short Introduction*, pg. 18
 3. Hamilton pg. 10
 4. Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Short Introduction*, pg. 18
 5. Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, pg. 124
 6. Hamilton pg. 293
 7. G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* pg. 22-23
- Curriculum Unit 13.03.06

8. Hamilton pg. 300
9. John Lewis Gaddis seminar 7/11/13
10. G. Thomas Couser, Memoir: An Introduction, pg. 183
11. Gaddis The landscape of History pg. 137
12. Nigel Hamilton, How to Do Biography, pg. 57
13. Hamilton pg. 10-11

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