



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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2017 Volume II: Literature, Life-Writing, and Identity

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## **Keeping it Real: Non-Fiction and Identity Formation in Teens**

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### **Introduction**

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*Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armour yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you.*

--George R.R. Martin (*Game of Thrones*)

Most adults can immediately connect with the angst and euphoria that accompany memories of high school. Those formative years during high school provide a forum for students to develop their identities, challenge their preconceived notions about other identities, and create personae. Teen angst, rebellion, and other behaviors often emerge as they struggle to “find themselves”. Developing self-esteem, crafting an identity, and finding one’s voice are especially challenging for the outliers, those students who feel disenfranchised from the mainstream. My students are not those poised to inherit the bounty America can offer. My students are those destined to struggle to find themselves and their place in this country. They are first and second generation immigrants who don’t feel secure due to the undocumented status of themselves or family members. They face challenges due to their race and socioeconomic status, and are often straddling two cultures. In a time where the modern marketplace is nothing but conflict, my students must create their unique identities and learn the power of self-advocacy and exercising their rights in a democratic society.<sup>1</sup> There is power in self-knowledge and I want my students to be able to navigate the world with grace. As Maya Angelou stated: “My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”

Teachers are uniquely positioned to help foster the identity development of their students, and I hope this unit provides them with the confidence to approach this complicated process. My six-week unit is specifically designed to be appropriate for my sophomores and to consistently approach the topic in a positive and respectful manner. My focus is specifically on non-fiction texts, explored through the lens of names, speech, and being a teenager--lenses which should be inclusive of all of my students. By providing supports such that students develop increasing mastery and analytical skills, it is my intention to foster increasing independence while simultaneously promoting a positive self-image. Students will consider the characteristics one is born with, how they are shaped by culture, how they are formed by choices, and how they are perceived by others.

The rigor will increase as they master specific skills through a process of examining each piece, with special focus on point of view, form, and tone, and considering what the effect of those choices is on the selection. This will develop student expertise and authority while addressing the Common Core State Standards.

## Identity Formation

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The struggle to develop a sense of one's own identity is particularly poignant in the life of a teenager. This sense of identity may seem elusive because they find themselves acting differently with a variety of groups of individuals in divergent settings. The concept of identity has typically been explored by psychologists through a variety of lenses: historical, socio-cultural, and developmental being the most common.<sup>2</sup> Exploring emotional, physical, and psychological metamorphoses becomes particularly challenging for teens whose hormones and bodies have rapidly altered, and who suddenly find themselves in a large and complex social dynamic.<sup>3</sup> Rebellion, experimentation, exclusion, and questioning are all typical among teens as they make the transition towards becoming independent, self-reliant individuals. These formerly egocentric individuals are now capable of using their critical thinking skills both to conduct self-analysis and to consider a differing perspective. This allows them to develop empathy and resolve conflicting viewpoints. An awareness and examination of their identities becomes an all-consuming obsession, often observable in the realm of a fixation on social media. Erik Erickson described eight stages of development and posited that cognitive neuroscience reveals that our sense of self is constructed through our impression of how others perceive us, and by introspection about our own traits.

[Adolescents] are sometimes morbidly, often curiously preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are. In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, which must now include sexual maturity, some adolescents have to come to grips again with crises of earlier years before they can install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity. Now a larger group unit, vague in its outline and yet immediate in its demands, replaces the childhood milieu— "society".<sup>4</sup>

We define ourselves, yet at the same time we are labeled by others. Teens are struggling to come to terms with the aspects of identity they cannot escape (race, sex, and heritage) while simultaneously creating a unique individual expression of their internal landscape. Teens are observing role models, peers, and others to determine which values and aspirations will shape their identities.<sup>5</sup> I want students to deeply consider the manner in which they perceive themselves interacting with the world. As a means of establishing their identities, teens often use specific brands, products, or other symbols to express affiliation with specific groups. They comprehend the need to meet societal expectations of adult functioning, but often at the expense of expressing their truly unique identities. Explicit recognition of this process develops a stronger self awareness among teens. As Herb Green expressed, the topic is rich and multi-faceted:

The parameters of my identity are not constrained by a single static border—my identity is fluid and flexible. In fact, sometimes the very essentialistic and reductive nationalistic ideas that are supposed to unite us and make us identifiable to ourselves and others often render us silent

about significant realities about ourselves and our individual desires. In my opinion, identities are far too complex to be reduced to pure essence.<sup>6</sup>

Students should also be left with the understanding that while adolescence is a psychologically significant period of self-knowledge, personality development continues to evolve throughout a lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Identity is not static, it is a fluid and flexible concept that evolves with the body of occurrences an individual experiences over their lifetime. This understanding leads an individual to consider that change is the only constant in our life and self-knowledge allows us to know and accept ourselves, while simultaneously being capable of effecting change upon our expression of our identities. This process also results in tolerance, acceptance, and appreciation of a variety of individuals, and their expression of their own identities. “Ultimately, however, it is only one’s ease with the process of change that will allow one to aid and not hinder another on his or her own life journey.”<sup>8</sup>

## Rationale

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### School Setting

San Jose is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in America and is the heart of Silicon Valley. It is also consistently ranked in the top five of most expensive cities in which to live in this country. Oak Grove High School serves approximately 1,875 students who come from working class families that are struggling to survive in an increasingly exclusive housing market. The economic and social struggle of our students and their families is apparent when you consider that over 56% of our students are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 14% of our population qualifying for Special Education services. Our school is a thriving multi-cultural environment and racially diverse, comprised of over 53% Hispanic/Latino, 21% Asian, 8% Caucasian and 6% African American. Student achievement in language arts has improved in the past few years as measured by mandated state testing, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASP). However, only 57% of our population met or exceed the expectation, while 43% were unable to achieve minimal competency in skills such as reading, writing, listening, and research & inquiry. Similarly, around 42% of our incoming freshmen read at or below a sixth grade level, which is alarming in and of itself.

If you also consider that most have never completed homework in middle school and have a negative perception of reading, the struggle to create a positive learning experience becomes even more challenging. Throughout freshman year, they have generally approached reading as a necessary component of the requirement to earn a passing grade and have only developed a rudimentary skill that really doesn’t demonstrate strategies and certainly doesn’t involve pleasure or appreciation. Our graduation rate has increased 14% since 2011 and our dropout rate has correspondingly decreased, yet this leaves 12.8% of our students who still drop out of high school.

Perhaps some of these statistics are the result of a lack of connection to an adult on campus. Perhaps some of these statistics are the result of curriculum that isn’t relevant or engaging. Perhaps some of these statistics are the result of chronic truancy. Perhaps these statistics are the result of insufficient modeling behavior or insufficient support systems. Regardless of what you attribute these statistics to, it is apparent that there is a need to change.

We have an Eagle Student Support Center (ESSC) on campus which is dedicated to offering the personal and social support necessary to create an environment where our students can be academically successful. The school social worker and a number of interns are inundated with requests to offer counseling and connect individuals with organizations in the community. Our school district, the East Side Union High School District, is focusing on creating Relationship-Centered Schools as a means of combating continuing cuts in funding and maintaining support systems such that we can close the opportunity gap. The ESSC and the Relationship-Centered Schools initiative both suggest that there is an increasing need for our students to feel emotionally connected to and safe within the academic environment. Establishing my classroom as a place where we talk about issues that matter in a sensitive and real manner will create connections with my students as well as between them. It is my hope that English will not be a class that they associate with merely grammar, paragraph structure, vocabulary and reading, but rather that these skills inherently are developed as a byproduct of a strong curriculum unit that is relevant and connected to the real world.

### **Why Non-Fiction?**

Non-Fiction texts relating to identity can be particularly effective because they feature real people with real problems. Students often need this connection with reality to engage with the academic content in my classroom and the relevance of stories about being a teenager is undeniable. Non-fiction is also advantageous when it comes to the literacy demands of higher education and career. Students who are conversant with a variety of informational text structures perform better in college and have built background knowledge necessary for academic achievement. Course texts include letters, editorials, autobiographies, memoirs, contemporary essays, brochures, and journalism. Differentiating instruction through genre makes sense when one considers that a majority of adult reading is to gather information from factual texts. Hence I hope that non-fiction texts will increase student engagement and familiarize students with the form and function of texts. I hope they will also develop an intrinsic love of learning based upon the use of the inquiry approach to content knowledge. Each of the three foci we explore will provide opportunities for students to compare multiple perspectives, while performing the role of a critical thinker. Furthermore, using these pieces as writing models will offer students opportunities to take on the role of author and write using these same lenses to create voice and perspective on the topic.

An exploration of non-fiction in particular will allow me to explore varied excerpts that speak to both the development of identity and the expression of pride in one's politics, sexuality, culture and identity. These texts will also provide models for the sophomores to learn the power of journaling for their own self discovery and an opportunity to explicitly explore their self-construct. I hope my students are able to find hope in the struggle to cement their identities and faith in their own voices through an exploration of a diverse range of authors. I intend that these texts provide examples of a variety of modalities that allow for self-expression. I predominately want to use non-fiction texts for classroom work and autobiographical poems/songs as creative samples to motivate and inspire my students. I want the mirror they hold up to themselves to reflect a positive image and the lens through which they look at their peers to be an open-minded and respectful one.

### **My Audience**

This specific unit will be perfect for my sophomores, who have some familiarity with the academic standards (Common Core State Standards are the same for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders) and some understanding of how to be a successful student. This group will be ready to discuss why some of my Vietnamese students use nicknames, which completely differ from their given name, and which are very Americanized. So many of my students act as translators for their parents and feel the burden of translating mature content such as medical and

governmental information, yet they rebel against their culture by speaking in English in all possible transactions. Our school is a safe environment for students to express their evolving gender identities in a variety of manners. Students will have the maturity to consider how history has shaped race relations in this country such that movements like Black Lives Matter are prominent in our news feeds. They will be able to analyze their modes of self-expression and how preferences for clothing styles, music, and hairstyles all craft a deliberate identity. By now, they will have experienced bullying and understand how judgments are made about others' external identity on a daily basis and what modes of response are available to them. They will be aware that exclusion is an act of bullying but is also a component of identity exploration. Overall, they are in a perfect place to examine themselves, their families, their friends, their community, and the world through a lens that empowers them and gives them the language to address concerns in a thoughtful and respectful manner. High quality instruction and learning opportunities that prepare my students to be thoughtful self-aware individuals will intrinsically lead to a positive learning environment, and will prepare students poised for success in college or careers.

## Content Objectives

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A familiarity with text structure and a confidence born of experience will develop as students consistently explore high-interest non-fiction texts. I envision this unit will encompass the first six weeks of the school year as shorter pieces will allow students (who invariably suffer schedule changes as late as four weeks into the school year) to slide into the content and it will allow me to develop interpersonal connections with my students while establishing a safe environment. The first week of the school year will focus on developing relationships, routines and rituals in the classroom and this unit will encompass the next five weeks. My hope is that students will develop an in-depth perception of what identity is and how it evolves over the course of a lifetime to reflect the experiences that shaped that individual.

### Essential Questions

What is identity? What are the various factors that shape identity?

In what ways is our identity defined by others?

How do names alter one's expectations for an individual's identity?

To what extent and in what ways do others judge us based upon our speech?

In what ways is being a teenager particularly difficult in terms of identity formation?

How is identity differently expressed or altered by differing forms of non-fiction?

## Identity Unit Foci

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Each of the selections for each focus will be analyzed on a chart so that students can compare and contrast the pieces and develop familiarity with some significant literary elements. The chart will have five columns: Name and author, format, point of view, tone and reaction.

### Format

Students will be expected to clearly identify the hallmarks of specific types of non-fiction and understand sub-genre subtleties such as the difference between memoir and autobiography. Creative nonfiction in the form of memoirs and personal essays will be prevalent in this unit as they reveal the narrator's experiences and the emotional consequences of events. Expository writing is informational whereas persuasive writing takes a stance on a particular issue. Biography is a written account of another individual's life; autobiography is a written account of an individual's life, written by that person. A memoir is an autobiography that focus on a specific aspect of an individual's life or a focused period of time.

Students will often fail to think beyond basic form, yet sophomore year is the ideal time for them to really consider the advantages and drawbacks to differing forms. How a piece of writing is constructed and organized is of paramount importance. Furthermore, they should note how sentence structure and the elements of style can be manipulated to affect a reader. Students will be expected to articulate why an author's choice of form is significant. The genre-bending of media and form, evident in an author like Claudia Rankine, will be explored with the specific purpose of understanding how form alters the message. As we progress throughout this curriculum unit, students will constantly be brought back to consider how the form married with the content and how that affected the message.

### Point of View

Although there is an expectation of basic fluency with point of view in the ninth grade standards, most students do not have a sophisticated understanding and are only able to identify the point of view in a rudimentary manner. A brief review of pronouns is advantageous prior to reviewing this concept of the author's deliberate choice of vantage point from which to relay their ideas. First person only allows the reader to know what the character knows and is often identifiable by the use of pronouns like *I*, *me* or *we*. Second person is infrequently encountered as it addresses the reader directly though the use of the pronouns *you* and *yours*. There are three types of third person point of view and all use the pronouns *he*, *she*, *it* or *they*. Third person objective is characterized by a narrator who remains a detached observer, hence the character's thoughts and feelings are never known. Third person limited is a narrator who is limited to a single character's viewpoint, thoughts, and feelings. Third person omniscient is the point of view that allows unlimited information about all of the character's actions, thoughts, and feelings.

Students will be expected not only be able to identify the basic point of view though which a narrative is presented, but also to understand how that choice interacts with the audience of the piece. For example, some of the letters written in second person are really for an audience larger than the individual "you" to whom the letter is addressed. The way in which that deliberate choice makes an author like Baldwin or Coates able to dislocate us and make the content affect us on a personal level.<sup>9</sup>

Focalization is another term students can use to demonstrate a more sophisticated view of point of view or

perspective. Focalization is similar to point of view in that an omniscient narrator would be non-focalized, events viewed from a single narrator's perspective are internally focalized, and external focalization occurs when the narrator merely observes the protagonist and exists outside of the consciousness. Although this theory was developed by Gerard Genette to relate to literature, it can easily extend to other types of texts such as film and television.

## **Tone**

Tone is an especially difficult concept for students to master and they often struggle to differentiate between tone and mood. This unit will provide ample practice with finding key words and noting how syntax, sentence structure, and form express so much of how the author feels about their topic. Even in nonfiction, an author's tone influences the mood and atmosphere of their writing. The easiest initial step to determining the author's tone (usually described as an adjective) is to have students note that they do comprehend tone when it is in a verbal exchange. Demonstrating how volume, voice tone, facial expression, timing and gesture are readily identified develops confidence among students as they explain why they know I'm feeling a certain way. Tone is not an action, it is an attitude, but you often have to read between the lines to determine the author's tone.<sup>10</sup> In order to determine this attitude, students systematically search for the level of formality, diction, syntax, imagery, and word choice.

## **Lenses**

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Humans are 99.5% genetically similar<sup>11</sup>, and yet we spend a lot of time and energy worrying about the other 0.5%. Conflict over race and social and economic disparity is one of the most significant issues facing youth today and they will need tools to rationally discuss sensitive political topics. We will examine identity through the lenses of names, speech, and teenagers. I chose these because I felt they were universal and provided an engaging but non-controversial point of entry into the content. Each of these lenses will provide a specific means of looking at human differences, while also addressing identity as a social construct (imposed from the outside) as well as a psychological formation (developed and experienced from inside). Each of the three lenses through which we will examine identity, (names, speech and teenagers), will take approximately one week. This will allow for an extra week for students to pursue a lens that is of particular interest to them (race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.) and engage with the entire writing process.

## **Teaching Strategies**

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### **Direct Instruction**

Students will need to have the literary elements of form, point of view, and tone front-loaded as they usually have limited or incorrect understanding of these terms. Additionally, a handout briefing them on the various subgenre of nonfiction will be helpful as will some statistics as to why they will benefit from gaining familiarity with these text structures. Lastly, students will need some basic understanding about the process of identity formation and how to operate in and maintain a respectful and safe environment.

## **Lit Circles**

Students will form a group of approximately four with other students interested in the same optional piece of literature. Students read independently and prepare to facilitate a conversation based upon homework they prepare. The vocabulary enricher selects a number of unfamiliar or jargon vocabulary to look up to enhance content knowledge or to further the conversation. The discussion director prepares some questions to promote a fruitful dialogue. The literary luminary carefully selects a few passages in the text to read aloud as they are some of the most thought provoking or memorable moments. The real world connector finds allusions and other connections to life experiences to share with the group. Optionally, an illustrator could be tasked with creating a cartoon or flow chart to enhance the depth of understanding of the piece.

## **SOAPSTone**

This acronym (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject and Tone) is intended to help students consider and evaluate an argument through a series of questions. Students will ask themselves, who is the speaker and what personae have they created. Next, the occasion can be understood in terms of time, place, context and background information. Audience necessitates consideration of the intended audience. Purpose is the explicit or implicit intention of the speaker and their worldview and assumptions must be considered. Tone requires students to consider the attitude of the speaker towards the subject, and perhaps even the audience.

## **SCARF**

Brain based strategies will be employed and David Rock's SCARF strategy about social domains will inform many of the activities in my learning environment. SCARF is an acronym to remind us that status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness are all considerations before your learning environment can be considered emotionally safe and create a sense of connections between my students. Hence, I will strive to avoid unclear lessons which fail to link to learning goals. I will provide clear rubrics of my expectations, but allow for a degree of autonomy and self expression.

## **GIST**

A GIST is a comprehension strategy to get students to identify the main idea of a text. Chunk text into highlighted sections #1-4, students must identify the GIST or "point" of each chunk and then list the evidence used to support the author's point. This scaffolded approach allows students to build confidence by connecting smaller pieces of a text before approaching the summary. The culmination of the activity is for students to write a summary of only about ten words that identifies the journalistic tenants of a piece: "who", "what", "when", "where", "why", and "how".

## **Reading Process**

I will deliberately teach reading strategies that will gradually release responsibility to the students. Close reading is a skill from which every student can benefit. Initially, I will read aloud to them, then they will take turns reading a segment of the text aloud and eventually they will be skilled enough to read independently. Deliberate instruction in reading strategies include: previewing the text, schema (prior knowledge), visualizing, determining what is important from the information they read, summarizing, analyzing, and reflecting.



## Journaling

Daily journaling will de-stigmatize the process of writing, promote a feeling of success, and allow students to explore their thoughts on a variety of questions and topics. Journaling will be a daily activity that will help students think more deeply upon some topics, establish goals, and have an opportunity for self-reflection. Hopefully interesting prompts will make the task less arduous and engage reluctant learners. Some days the prompt will be questions, other days it will be songs that they must reflect upon, and occasionally the task will be to draw something. Some prompts include: Three things I like about myself, describe your bedroom from a dog's perspective, one moment I'll never forget, my favorite meal my family makes, describe unconditional love, what five characteristics are most important in a best friend, why topics like sex and profanity are taboo, describe yourself in 10 words, what have you ever learned from a mistake or failure?

## Teaching Activities

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### Week One

Week One is intended as an introduction to the idea of identity and will focus on the lens of names. Students will begin by creating a collage, mask (exterior and interior covered with images and quotes), or diorama called 'Who Am I?', which will allow students who struggle to communicate using language the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of content while expressing their unique skill set. Daily journals will be modeled and the routine of daily writing established. Front loading about the literary elements, identity formation, and the types of nonfiction will occur. A discussion of language and pejoratives will help shape an awareness of how we craft the identity of others as well as some consideration of stereotypes. Vocabulary such as alienation, appropriation, assimilation, bias, code-switching, conformity, culture, discrimination, exclusion, gender, heritage, ideology, inclusion, linguistic assimilation, marginalize, migration, multicultural, ostracism, prejudice, racism, registers, self-esteem, stereotypes, values, and xenophobia will be explored. Students will complete the names unit by way of introduction into the larger unit and begin to fill in the chart that will give them a meta-perspective on the larger unit.

The Names unit will begin in a similar manner to Jill Campbell's seminar on Literature, Life Writing and Identity.<sup>12</sup> Students will use their phones to pull up definitions for "names" and share them with the class. I'll then project those definitions and ask them to reflect upon their own name. They will consider their first, middle and last names, nicknames, the way these names are pronounced and mispronounced, and the historical connections. Each student will jot their ideas in a quick journal and then orally present their ideas in a two-minute flow of ideas.

After this activity, students will be introduced to the overall theme of identity. They will explore what the term identity means and be led to understand how significant a positive self-image is. Looking back at the name activity and noting how many students discussed the history of their family name, or how they have adapted to people of other cultures mispronouncing their name, and other commonalities, will allow them to see the links between names and identity. Students will consider the following questions: What does your name mean? How does it sound? What does it mean to you? Have you ever wanted to change your name? Do people ever mispronounce your name? Why is stripping a person of their name (such as during the Holocaust or at Ellis Island) so damaging to one's cultural identity?

Students will read Julia Alvarez' piece "Nombres" to apply some of the strategies for analyzing literature, especially tone. "By Any Other Name" by Santha Rama Rau, and the poem "Our Tongues Were Slapped into Silence" will afford students the opportunity to see the damaging effects on identity of having one's name and culture negated by another people. A number of selections relating to name are available in the resource section. After completing various readings, students will then write a one-page product about their own name.

## **Week Two**

Week two will focus on longer and more revelatory journals as we shift our lens towards speech. Students will practice close reading, lit circles, and the GIST strategy as they work through the speech unit. Daily journals will continue as will focus on the reading process as will work on the chart. This week students will write an advice column for the school paper. Students will write letters about issues like bullying, dealing with racism about dark skin, wearing a hijab, coming out to one's parents, or any other topic that piques their interest. Students will all work in small groups to come up with appropriate advice to one another and then each individual will write a response for the column using their best journalistic style. In addition, students will develop questions in class for an interview with a family member and work in small groups to develop those into ten open-ended questions that will provide a great deal of insight.

The manner in which we use language is an expression of our identity. Speech is more than merely words. It is a mode of expression that testifies to where we are from and who we are. Word choice, dialect, syntax and language all contribute to creating an identity through our speech. An introductory activity involving vocabulary will lead students to understand why word choice matters.

Using an inappropriate register can distract people from your ideas and the value of your opinion. A humorous example is the way in which Sheldon Cooper often uses a more formal register when addressing his friends, which makes his social ineptitude comedic on the popular sitcom "The Big Bang Theory". However, a sad reality is that use of too informal a register might prevent an individual from advancing in a career. My purpose is to encourage students to have a speech style that is in sync with their culture, but to also develop alternate registers appropriate to different audiences. Students may consider focusing on what message they want to send and how they expect the recipient to feel upon hearing them in a given speech style. Sociolinguistically speaking, there are five registers, which describe the level of formality in a person's speech. Intimate, casual, consultative, formal, and frozen are increasingly rigid levels which can be distinguished by the sophistication of the vocabulary used as well as the complexity and regularity with which the speaker uses grammar and syntax. An awareness of register and code-switching as a strategy will create a more savvy reader and writer who is able to understand an aspect of the art of persuasion.

A persuasive essay by James Baldwin, "If Black Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" offers a compelling argument in a form that will challenge students. Vera Regan's TedTalk "What Your Speaking Style, Like, Says About You," offers a visual presentation of a text for students to reflect on how others perceive you based upon the register you use when speaking, as will Amy Tan's essay "Mother Tongue". A variety of other selections on speech, including the Dave Sedaris piece on having a speech impediment in the form of a lisp, are available in the resource section.

## **Week Three**

Week Three seeks to have students use some of the vocabulary they have acquired as they will be engaging in a lot of conversation about being a teenager. Students will have even more independent responsibility released to them as they continue to write their daily journals, use the GIST strategy, operate in lit circles,

filling in the chart, and practice the reading process. A homework assignment will require students to interview a family member about their family history via a structured series of questions will increase engagement and personal relevance. Hopefully, it will also allow students to learn about their roots from family members and create a deeper appreciation of their history and community. Students will then write a summary of their findings in the form of a letter to another relative to share the results of the interview. Exploring their roots will create an opportunity to dialogue with family in a different manner and provide many of my students with a new perspective on their family life. It is my hope that they will see their place in history and chafing at the restrictions inherent in being a teen will be reduced.

Teenagers are the recipients of a variety of conflicting messages about identity.<sup>13</sup> The pace of change in modernity is constantly accelerating as a result of the use of technology, and communication is perhaps most notably altered for teens. They use social media, video games and cell phones to such an extent that they often feel isolated. Their entire lives are forever recorded on Snapchat and Instagram to the extent that they feel they are constantly “on stage”. For some, their material wealth is often in contrast to the poverty their parents experienced and they are judged to be unappreciative of their many luxuries. By the same token, the values celebrated in popular music refer to brand names, “bling”, and other material wealth necessary to be considered successful. In addition, that same music that occupies such a central position in their lives expresses a sexuality and image that is daunting to students who are still exploring their sexuality and the expression of that identity. Many students come from families that left other countries to offer safety or better opportunities to their children, and they perceive that these teens “have it easy”. Labels like “entitled,” and “spoiled”, “lazy” and “disrespectful” are indiscriminately used to describe this generation.

Even for teens who avoid those labels, there are challenges. Academically, students are forced to take rigorous AP classes, participate in a sport, and join a club just to have a chance to be accepted to a good university. And the future may not look bright as student loans, inability to earn enough to survive in the Bay Area, and global competition for jobs are their reality. Modern teens are also uniquely frustrated by and chafing against the restrictions dictated by their age. In an era where they are able to access virtually anything via Google or YouTube, they often feel curfews, dress codes, and other age-based restrictions are inappropriate. They respond to these many pressures with teenage angst, rebellion, over-achieving, joining in cliques, and using clothing or adornment to “try on” different identities.

One of the first activities will be a viewing of Lily Vellekamp’s Ted Talk about the challenges of being a teen. My hope is that this allows students to hear a thesis statement backed up with specific evidence on a topic they can all relate to and feel their frustrations are valid and their voice matters. A brochure created by the State Bar of California, “When You Turn 18” will be an invaluable real-world connection for students who will learn about laws relating to disturbing the peace, driving while intoxicated, lease agreements, and a myriad of other legal realities that change when a student reaches the age of majority. Students will read the article in Psychology Today by Judy Willis, M.D. “What to Do About Your Teenager’s Eye-Roll” and evaluate the advice she offers parents in coping with a dissatisfied teenager. A scholarly article by Emmeline Zhao “Why Identity and Emotion Are Central to Motivating the Teen Brain,” will provide a good opportunity to practice summarizing. A variety of other texts, including a song, are listed in the resource section for Teenagers.

#### **Week Four**

Students will select a topic that interests them, perhaps about race, religion, age, class or gender and form small groups. They must use at least three non-fiction texts (but I recommend each individual view or read at least five) to create a PowerPoint to sensitively and powerfully educate their classmates. My rubric requires at

least ten slides with at least three quotes and clips and at least one counter-argument that they will present to the class.

## Week Five

As a summative assessment, students will view “Beautiful” by Sonya Rene, in which an African American woman provides a narrative about her lifelong struggles to accept her hair. Based upon this example, students will have the opportunity to write a narrative of their own focusing on some aspect of their identity that they will either read to the class or record video of themselves performing. Students may elect to only have me view the video or share it with the class. We will look back at the completed chart and really discuss how the variety of forms of non fiction worked in concert with the author’s purpose and message. We will further recall the diverse range of types of non fiction we explored and the variety of rhetorical strategies, tone and other aspects of the author’s expression that marked those pieces.

As a final cathartic activity students will be given an index card on which they are to write one word that has been used to label an identity they resent. On the reverse, students and the teacher will write all of the adjectives and emotions that relate to hearing that word and feeling restricted by it. Each individual will stand in a circle and hold the index card with the label facing away from their chest and say that word aloud. Teacher will provide about thirty seconds of silence for students to silently read the words they wrote on the back of the card. As the teacher plays the song “Perfect” by Pink, students will all rip their card into as many pieces as possible and either throws them into a trash can in the middle of the circle or throws them into the air.

## Resources

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### Teacher Resources

#### Background Reading

Cole, Luella, and John J. B. Morgan. *Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

Erikson, Erik H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968.

Hammond, Zaretta & Yvette Jackson. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, a SAGE Company, 2015.

Irwin, Judith L. *Reading and the Middle School Student*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998.

Kroger, Jane. *Identity in Adolescence: The Balance Between Self and Other*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Marcia, J. E. “Development and Validation of the Ego-Identity Status.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3, no 5 (1966): 551-558. doi:10.1037/h0023281

Nelson, Hilda Lindeman. *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Thompson, Becky & Sangeeta Tyagi. *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*. London: Routledge, 1996.

## Names Reading List

Alvarez, Julia. "Names/ Nombres" from *Beyond Expectations: Treasury of Literature*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1993. (Essay on how a Dominican immigrant experiences maligned names and the damage that does to identity)

How does the family react to the initial mispronunciation of their name by immigration? Describe the author's reaction to her new names.

What is the significance of the Shakespeare quote about a rose?

What seems to be the author's purpose in writing this piece?

Rau, Santha Rama "By Any Other Name" from *Gifts of Passage: An Informal Autobiography*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966. (Autobiographic sketch about her identity crises when her name is Anglicized by a teacher)

Why do you think the teacher changed her name from Santha to Cynthia?

In what other ways do you see Indian and British culture interacting in this essay?

Why does Santha become confused when asked her name?

Why does her sister leave school and never return and what does this say about her identity?

Tohe, Laura. "Our Tongues Slapped into Silence" from *No Parole Today*. Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 1999. (Diné poem focuses on lack of access to Native languages and teacher's mispronunciation of names)

What is ironic about the use of the "Dick and Jane" books in the poetry?

What can you infer is the reason the teacher used corporal punishment for students caught speaking in their native tongue?

Use words, phrases and evidence from the text to demonstrate that the poet has negative memories of her assimilation?

How are the cultural assumptions of another culture imposed and what similarities are there to "By Any Other Name"?

## Speech Reading List

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "How Not to Tame a Wild Tongue: Wanderwords in Theory." *Wanderwords : Language Migration in American Literature*. doi:10.5040/9781628927184.0007.

Baldwin, James. "If Black English isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" *The Black Scholar* 27, no. 1 (1997): 5-6. doi:10.1080/00064246.1997.11430831. (persuasive essay)

Lyiscott, Jamila. "Three Ways to Speak English. Teen | TED Talk. Accessed July 26, 2017. [https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila\\_lyiscott\\_3\\_ways\\_to\\_speak\\_english](https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english)

Regan, Vera. "What your speaking style, like, says about you." *Teen | TEDxDublin*. Accessed July 13, 2017. <https://youtu.be/jAGgKE82034>

Sedaris, David. "Go Carolina" excerpt from *Me Talk Pretty One Day*. London: Abacus, 2013. (lisp)

Sheinin, Dave and Krissah Thompson. "Redefining the Word" 2014

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/11/09/the-n-word-an-entrenched-racial-slur-now-more-prevalent-than-ever/?utm\\_term=.37067b44a44f](http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/11/09/the-n-word-an-entrenched-racial-slur-now-more-prevalent-than-ever/?utm_term=.37067b44a44f)

Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue" from *The Threepenny Review*. Berkeley, CA, 2001.

<http://theessayexperiencefall2013.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/files/2013/09/Mother-Tongue-by-Amy-Tan.pdf> (essay on registers)

Widrich, Leo. "Which Words Matter The Most When You Talk" 4/4/13

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3007821/which-words-matter-most-when-you-talk>

## Teenagers Reading List

Khalid. 8Teen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HM-nqhPI7ho> (Profanity! Song)

King, Ryan Caron. "What's the Hardest Part of Being a Teen?" <http://wnpr.org/post/what-s-hardest-part-about-being-teen>

Martin, Michel. "Teenagers Are 'Crazy' But Expert Says Behavior is Vital to Development." (cole n.d.)

<http://www.npr.org/2014/01/28/267608451/teenagers-are-crazy-but-expert-says-behavior-is-vital-to-development>

State Bar of California. "When you Turn 18." <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/publications/Turn-18.pdf> (superb resource that outlines the legal rights and responsibilities related to turning 18 including driving, renting, illegal substances and credit)

Vellekamp, Lily. Being a Teen | TED Talk | YouTube.com. June 03, 2016. Accessed August 04, 2017. <https://youtu.be/L2iqczxkB-s>. (A teenager speaks out about the hardships of being devalued and treated like a "kid" and how that brings on stress)

Willis, Judy, M.D. "What to Do About Your Teenager's Eye-Roll"

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/radical-teaching/201305/what-do-about-your-teenager-s-eye-roll>

Zhao, Emmeline. "Why Identity and Emotion Are Central to Motivating the Teen Brain." 7/14

<https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/12/10/why-identity-and-emotion-are-central-to-motivating-the-teen-brain/>

## Optional Student Resources

Alvarez, Julia. "Hair/Pelos" from *Beyond Expectations: Treasury of Literature*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1993.

Benaji, Mahzarin, et al, Project Implicit. Accessed July 16, 2017. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>. (website, including self-test for unconscious prejudice)

Boyle, Father Gregory. *Tattoos On the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2011. ( LA gangs, memoir)

Cara, Alessia, writer. Scars to your beautiful (remixes). EP Entertainment, LLC / Def Jam, 2016, CD. (feminist anthem)

Chua, Amy. *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. (Culture clash between Chinese and Western values)

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, and Klaus Amann. *Between the World and Me*. Ditzingen: Reclam, Philipp, 2017. (Powerful book length letter to teenage black son about the history of race relations in America and the reality of the struggle)

Gorey, Elisabeth. "My Mother Tells the Story of Her Alabama Childhood" | A poem a day. Accessed August 19, 2017.  
<http://exceptindreams.livejournal.com/322399.html> (perception by outsiders)

Gregory, Richard and Robert Lipsyte. "Shame" from *Autobiography of Dick Gregory*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1965. (excerpt on poverty called "Shame" discuss image, prejudice, perceiving a situation from another perspective, and dignity)

India.Arie. *I Am Not My Hair*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_5jlt0f5Z4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_5jlt0f5Z4) (song)

Lyon, George Ella. "Where I'm From" <http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html> (poem)

Macat. "An Introduction to Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks- A Macat Sociology Analysis." You Tube | <https://youtu.be/TR3hcm41Nb8>.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water*. Brisbane: Queensland Braille Writing Association, 1999.

Moaveni, Azadeh. *Lipstick Jihad: a Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*. Princeton, NJ: Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 2006. (memoir)

Mock, Janet. *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015. (Autobiography on trans identity)

Murray, Pauli. *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1956. (Skin color and historical significance as an activist for women's rights, civil rights and gay rights).

Pham, Andrew X. *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam*. London: Flamingo, 2001. (travel memoir: returns to Vietnam and renounces his heritage)

Polanco, Julio Noboa. "Identity"  
<http://www.conejousd.org/Portals/49/Departments/English/Burns/identity%20poem%20and%20song.pdf> (poem)

Rene, Sonya. "Beautiful" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCcMXfrb8lw>

Rocero, Geena. Geena Rocero: Why I must come out | TED Talk | TED.com. Accessed July 19, 2017.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/geena\\_rocero\\_why\\_i\\_must\\_come\\_out](https://www.ted.com/talks/geena_rocero_why_i_must_come_out). (Fashion model speaks about being trans)

Rose, Ruby. *Transformation*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyY7MY3R8Fs> (XRATED! Video about being gender fluid)

Russell, Cameron. Cameron Russell: Looks Aren't Everything. Believe Me, I'm a Model. | TED Talk. Accessed August 04, 2017.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/cameron\\_russell\\_looks\\_aren\\_t\\_everything\\_believe\\_me\\_i\\_m\\_a\\_model](https://www.ted.com/talks/cameron_russell_looks_aren_t_everything_believe_me_i_m_a_model). (Image of women as a construction and building awareness of societal focus on outward appearance)

Santiago Baca, Jimmy. "Who Understands me, But Me" from *Immigrants in Our Own Land and Selected Early Poems*. New Directions Publishing Co., 1990.

Tan, Amy. "Fish Cheeks" from *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. (parents and culture)

Tohe, Laura. "The Names" in *No Parole Today*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. (Navajo poem remembers and honors the names of individuals)

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy: (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*. New York ( N.Y.): Olive Editions/HarperPerennial, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2015. (poverty, race)

Young, Vershawn Ashanti. *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007. (Students will be urged to consider the use of prose as Young uses sentence length and complexity as a stylistic device. Separating rhetorical strategies (such as repetition and altering sentence length) from content will assist students in beginning to better analyze argument and begin to understand style)

## Appendix

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### Learning Goals

To increase students' repertoire of cognitive and metacognitive strategies for approaching a variety of non-fiction texts

To promote the ability to analyze and interpret informational texts

To develop student ability to read and comprehend a variety of non-fiction texts with a similar fluency as they do fiction

### Common Core State Standards

W.9-10. 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3.) should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10.) *A focus on journaling, letter writing and other writing will hone student's skills while developing familiarity and comfort with a variety of types of writing.*

L.9-10.6. Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. *The acquisition of appropriate and respectful terminology to discuss identity will allow students to more respectfully converse about issues relating to identity. Students will also become quite conversant with the sub-genres related to non-fiction and be able to identify them in subsequent exposures.*

RI. 9-10.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. *Dyads, Socratic Seminars, and all of the other exercises in this unit are intended to force students to cite evidence from the text to support their inferences. Habitual use of the phrase "evidence from the text" will accustom students to using quotes and paraphrases to support their inferences.*



## Notes

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1. "Personal identity, understood as a complicated interaction of one's own sense of self and other's understanding of who one is, functions as a lever that expands or contracts one's ability to exercise moral agency." Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, xi.
2. Jane Kroger, *Identity in Adolescence*, 2.
3. Furthermore, the populations used prior to the 1960's to explore this topic were typically institutionalized youth as opposed to a normative population, so our understanding of development processes is relatively new. Kroger, 8.
4. Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 128.
5. "The difficulty of sorting through lessons about racial identity also relates to the ways in which messages about race, as well as sexuality, class, and gender are signaled to children in countless, everyday ways—the furniture in their homes, their verbal expressions and accents, the ways they hold their bodies in public settings, the children with whom they are allowed to play. Often, these lessons are stated indirectly through lessons about manners, taste, and rituals." Thompson and Tyagi, "Storytelling as Social Conscience: The Power of Autobiography" in *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, xiii.
6. Green, Herb, "Turning the Myths of Black Masculinity Inside/Out" in *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, 253-4.
7. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crises*, 96. "Erikson painted not only a more optimistic picture of human capabilities, but also shifted the emphasis of psychoanalysis from pathology to healthy functioning. Finally, Erikson recognized that personality development did not end in adolescence but rather continued to evolve throughout the lifespan." Kroger, *Identity in Adolescence*, 16.
8. Jane Kroger, *Identity in Adolescence*, 209.
9. Jill Campbell, in seminar on "Literature, Life Writing, and Identity", 7/10/2017.
10. <https://www.slideshare.net/sharonelin/authors-tone> 7/15/2017.
11. Mark Saltzman, in lecture at Yale National Initiative, 7/13/2017.
12. Jill Campbell, in seminar on "Literature, Life Writing, and Identity", 5/5/2017.
13. "The search for a new and yet reliable identity can perhaps best be seen in the persistent adolescent endeavor to define, overdefine, and redefine themselves and each other in often ruthless comparison, while a search for reliable alignments can be recognized in the restless testing of the newest in possibilities and the oldest in values." Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crises*, 87.

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