

Minnesota Writing Project
Demonstration Lesson
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Title: From Memoir to Expository Writing with Advanced English Language Learners

Grade: 11 - 12, though parts can be used or adapted for all grades

Context: The following lessons were designed for former ELL students enrolled in a new college in the schools course, Writing Laboratory: Basic College Writing. The course uses the idea of the individual learning process and educational reform as a thematic focus. The students in my spring class were originally from Laos, Ethiopia, Venezuela, Russia, and Vietnam. Some of the students had been in the USA only three years, while others have been here five years or more. The course will be taught again in 03/04 in at four St. Paul high schools in cooperation with the Commanding English Center at the University of Minnesota.

Approximate Length: one 50 minute class period to introduce memoirs; around one week to scaffold the academic reading and writing activities to prepare for the paper analyzing aspects of US educational reform citing academic articles from *Rethinking the Schools*.

General Goals of Lesson: (1) to introduce students to memoir so that they gain confidence in their writing, revising and editing so they can move from a personal narrative to a thematic analysis of the memoir, *The Color of Water* by James McBride. (2) engage students in thoughtful dialogue about their own learning process, so they can they look critically at educational reform and complete expository writing with citations using articles from *Rethinking the Schools*.

Objectives to be covered:

- Introduce memoir
- To help students connect writing with story telling and personal experience
- To spur ideas and connections for students to begin writing in their writer's notebook
- To give students techniques for telling their own story
- To get student to think about how they learn, so they can begin to look critically at their own learning

Rationale: Memoir and narrative allow students to draw from and value their own experiences. Their stories are valuable and become part of the curriculum. The first person narrative and the memoir are also effective stepping stones to other types of academic writing.

Brief Summary/ Outline:

- Music and memory
- Eduardo Galeano on power of words and memory/ Randy Bomer on details and imagination
- *The Color of Water* on audio tape: Chapters 1 and 2, two voices (*note: the audio version of the book edits some of the material from the published memoir)
 - listen for personal connection that conjure up your own memories and writing
 - examples of lines that work well
 - techniques that James and his mother use as storytellers to pull us in
- *Nuchi's paper*
- Paper Three: Suggestions for Changes to Education in the USA (in your school)
- Learning styles and retention
- Dang's paper
- Heroes - Garrison Keillor
- ELL resources

From *The Book of Embraces* - Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan author

Introduction

Recordar: To remember; from the Latin re-cordis, to pass back through the heart.

The Function of Art (p. 17)

Diego had never seen the sea. His father, Santiago Kovadloff, took him to discover it. They went south. The ocean lay beyond high sand dunes, waiting. When the child and his father finally reached the dunes after much walking, the ocean exploded before their eyes. And so immense was the sea and its sparkle that the child was struck dumb by the beauty of it. And when he finally managed to speak, trembling, stuttering, he asked his father: "Help me to see!"

Grapes and Wine (p. 18)

*On his deathbed, a man of the vineyards spoke into Marcela's ear. Before dying, he revealed his secret: "The grape," he whispered, "is made of wine."
Marcela Pérez-Silva told me this, and I thought: If the grape is made of wine, then perhaps we are the words that tell who we are.*

The Passion of Speech (p. 19)

Marcela was visiting the snowy North. One night in Oslo, she met a woman who sang and told stories. Between songs, she would spin yarns, glancing at slips of paper like someone telling fortunes from crib notes. This woman from Oslo had on an enormous dress dotted all over with pockets. She would pull slips of paper out of her pockets one by one, each with its story to tell, stories tried and true of people who wished to come back to life through witchcraft. And so she raised the dead and the forgotten, and from the depths of her dress sprang the odysseys and loves of the human animal for whom speech is life.

Forgetting (p. 111)

I am reading a novel by Louise Erdrich. At one point, a great grandfather meets his great grandson. The great grandfather is completely senile ("his thoughts are the color of water") and displays the same beatific smile as his newly born great grandson. The great grandfather is happy because he has lost his memory. His great grandson is happy because he doesn't yet have any memory. This, I imagine, is perfect felicity. I want no part of it.

Time for Meaning - Randy Bomer (p. 163)

In most good memoir, it is not so much the hugeness of what happens to the subject that sticks with a reader, but the ordinary minutiae of the everyday. Some kids panic when they begin to see this, because, well, they just can't remember every word someone said when they were three or the particular pattern on the upholstery of their aunt's sofa...What they need to be taught is that much of the work of remembering is imaginary. We as readers don't test memoir for precision, and it isn't necessary for authors to scrape the edges of their brain trying painstakingly to extract every drop of accurate detail. Rather they select and even invent details that tell the larger truth about their lives. That's why William Zinsser titled his book about memoir, Inventing the Truth.

Audio Resources:

- The song, "El Carretero" (the Cart Driver) by Buena Vista Social Club; self titled CD
- *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride

Text Resources:

- *The Book of Embraces/ Libro de los Abrazos* by Eduardo Galeano; Translation: Cedric Belfrage with Mark Schafer
- *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride
- *Rethinking Schools: An Agenda for Change, Leading Reformers Speak Out* Edited by David Levine, Robert Lowe, Bob Peterson, and Rita Tenorio
- *Time for Meaning: crafting literate lives in middle and high school* by Randy Bomer
- *Thinking Through Genre: Units of Study in Reading and Writing Workshops 4-12* by Heather Lattimer

English Language Learner Resources

- See handout, suggested Teacher Resources for use with English Language Learners
- *Immigration in Minnesota booklet* Minneapolis Foundation (lists cultural resources)
- *The CALLA Handbook: Implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach* by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley (includes effective learning strategies for all students as well as content lessons in literature, social studies, science, and math)
- *Amazing English* by Teresa Walter (instructional strategies for language acquisition, literacy, academic content, and assessment)
- *Grammar Games: cognitive, affective and drama activities for EFL* by Mario Rinvolucri
- *Five-Minute Activities: a resource book of short activities (for language teachers)* by Penny Ur and Andrew Wright
- *Passing the Minnesota Test of Written Composition* by Devin Pintozzi, Maria Struder, Brian Freel (to order call 1-888-264-5877 or see www.americanbookcompany.com)
- *Passing the Minnesota Basic Standards Test in Reading* by Dr. Frank Pintozzi and Devin Pintozzi (to order call 1-888-264-5877 or see www.americanbookcompany.com)
- *Access and Engagement: program design and instructional approaches for immigrant students in secondary school* by Aída Walqui
- *Into, Through, and Beyond Secondary School: critical transitions for immigrant youths* by Tamara Lucas
- *ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)
- *Minnesota English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners K-12: with links to Minnesota Academic Standards for Language Arts and Math*, Minnesota Department of Education, <http://education.state.mn.us> contact the LEP Education Unit at 651-582-8594

Other Resources:

- For more information about the CIS Writing Laboratory Course at the U of M, Barbara Hodne, Faculty Coordinator: (w) 612-625-7847; hodne002@umn.edu
- For more information about the College in the Schools program: 612-625-1855; cis@cce.umn.edu; or see their website at www.cce.umn.edu/cis/
- Retention Methods Pyramid resources courtesy of Steve Hoffman