

Meeting Ourselves in Literature: How Do Choices Create a Character?

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Introduction

A brief academic year ago, I was a third grade teacher in a “blue ribbon” multicultural elementary school nestled within the University of Delaware community in Newark, Delaware. It had been a gratifying year, and one of my favorites by far. For most of my career I have taught in independent private schools, where the Common Core Standards were not that common, but creativity was. Today I teach English Language Arts (ELA) to sixth graders at Bayard Middle School in downtown Wilmington. Unlike other middle school ELA and Math teachers in the district, at Bayard both ELA and Math teachers are also the Special Education teacher and case manager for their students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) within their classroom. What for most others is the job of co-teachers, (one as the Lead Teacher and other as the Special Education co-teacher providing learning support and writing and implementing IEPs), for me is the job of one. The timing could not be worse: I have now met the student population at highest risk of any in my career, but teach them with far fewer resources and less time than I have ever had at my disposal.

Last spring, when envisioning how I would maximize my opportunity as a Delaware Teachers’ Institute fellow, I had boundless enthusiasm for designing lessons using fine arts to augment what does not even need any enhancement - literature. Now I have realigned my thinking as I am determined that my students benefit from this unit in a “dramatic” life-changing way. Not only do my students live in economic poverty, their lives are also poor in the sense of being empty of simple opportunities, such as enjoying school, loving to read, and feeling successful as learners. Even the mandated act of attending school is difficult for most of them, often having to face conflict, hostility, and an absence of positive role models among their peers.

Jarring glimpses of their real lives sometimes are revealed to me through conversation and their journal entries. One male student shared some of the most important things he has learned in life, and revealed, “It is really hard to go to school without getting in trouble because it is really important to answer what people have to say or they keep going and bug you and try to get you in trouble. Life is nuthin to play with because it’s really hard.” Nothing could prepare me for their responses when this prompt was recently given when I was preparing them for exploring heroes in literature: “Have you done anything heroic yet? Has someone ever done anything heroic for you? Share your thoughts about being a hero.” Consider this girl’s admission: “I did a heroic thing

because when my mom didn't have enough of money to pay the rent I sell clothes and toys and some other stuff. I earn almost \$100. So I give to her the money so we pay the rent." The most haunting and heart wrenching one came from a quiet boy who rarely speaks, but shared in his writing: "The most heroic thing I've done was catching a rat before it bit my brother. It was running so fast!"

These students of mine need to find some refuge in life, and it is my desire that some small oasis might be extended to them within our English Language Arts classroom, and that all of them might become more independent learners committed to pursuing their own education and convinced that they can work to build their futures. The first priority in planning my instruction was to more fully understand the collective mindset of my students. Researching high-poverty urban environments yielded confirmation on what I had already experienced, that students living in high-poverty urban areas are as a group typically perceived as low-achieving, disinterested, and limited in their potential. ¹I resolve to keep a "growth mindset" and have learned that though it is a daily ordeal for my students to come to a school with a hostile social climate filled with conflict and confrontation, much of their behavior is a façade or protective armor that helps them survive living so close to the streets. During a recent writing activity in which we all shared our secret fears, (and they were assured that their responses would be kept confidential), the stress that comes with living how and where they do, dominated their thoughts and jolted mine. A common thread among them was the violence: "I'm afraid to get beat up by a lot of people, I'm scared to walk by myself, I'm afraid I'll get shot, I'm scared to go to funerals, I'm scared of the streets because there was a guy that got shot in a wheelchair and the next day another person got shot." This translates into my writing this unit designed just for them. The intent of this unit is for my students to learn to dream large, to meet characters who do face challenges, make difficult choices, and find themselves and their circumstances are able to change and relate that those changes can only happen when a closed mindset is developed into a growth mindset.

Demographics

Although my mantra is that I do not teach a grade, but I teach children, for the sake of delineating demographics I teach 6th graders at Bayard Middle School within the Christina School District in Wilmington, Delaware. Bayard is designated a "priority" school by the state of Delaware; meaning it is among the six schools with the lowest academic performance (5%) of all the Title I schools in the state, with a demonstrated lack of progress over the past three years, serving students from low-income households and minority populations. My new students, and there are 81 of them, are mostly reading at the same grade level as my former group of 17 third graders. About 30% of my students receive accommodations because of their learning differences, and an additional 15% of my students are English Language Learners (ELL). In contrast to the other

middle schools in the district, my ELL students receive their English Language Arts instruction within a regular classroom setting with me, rather than with an ELL teacher.

It would be remiss of me as an educator to ignore the research and the perspective or mindset of my students. Educational researchers have long noted that, “Any educational or training system that ignores the history or perspective of its learners or does not attempt to adjust its teaching practices to benefit all its learners is contributing to inequality of opportunity.” My class ranges in reading ability from the primer to slightly above grade level, so it is essential to differentiate instruction for a wide range. The final statistic that speaks of the direst need: a full 98% of my students come from households that are in “severe poverty.” I have decided that the last thing these students deserve is having a teacher who would not want to be there; therefore I want to be there. My students have begun their first year at Bayard Middle School at the same time that I began my first year there, too.

Rationale

What I want most out of this unit is for my students to have an opportunities and experiences with literature that are life changing because they better understand themselves and learn that they are empowered when they see that they have choices and can create change. On a personal level, I have been changed by my reading, and find even pieces I have read long ago when re-read, reveal different things to me because I am a different person than I was the first time I read a title.

After a mere eight weeks of teaching in an urban setting, it was clear to me that most of my students do not possess an internal locus of control or “growth mindset,” but rather feel that they have little power or control in their own lives. According to Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, when a person possesses a growth mindset, “People believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point.”² This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Given the scarcity of real-life examples in their lives, my students need to experience writing that will show them that choices can change circumstances and themselves, and that these choices are linked to our character traits.

It is an on-going process for me to understand what my students are thinking and what they value, as well as maintain healthy connections so they feel comfortable sharing. Being adolescents, my students are often reluctant to share in front of the entire group, but will open up when in a safe, small group or in writing that they know will not be shared. One expert, Dr. Ruby Payne, explained in her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, that many, “schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules [or values] of middle class, which are often different from

students' values." Historically, the development of character has been a goal of American education. "Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann considered universal public education as a lever for instilling in children the values such as respect, loyalty, and self-discipline necessary to develop well-rounded citizens."³

Though indeed values such as work ethic are taught, it is impossible to ignore the collision of different value systems, when in the inner city loyalty is valued over honesty and the adage, "A snitch gets a stitch" guarantees silence. My students fiercely value loyalty and independence, and are cautious in their dealings with adults. In exploring the research done to understand the influence of poverty on the urban school environment and the urban student, "Urban teachers must develop an understanding of the hidden rules of poverty in order to reach their students. Poverty impacts the lives and cultural values of many students in urban schools. Examples of the hidden rules in poverty include a high noise level, the extreme importance on entertainment (primarily mainstream), and emphasis on physicality. These same children living under this poverty framework are expected to adjust to a completely different set of values when entering the classroom environment."⁴

For this middle-class, middle school teacher, working in the ghetto of Wilmington, Delaware, has revealed startling contrasts between my acquired middle-class values and those of my students living in severe poverty. Simple premises, such as trust, are not "givens" in the lives of my students. The view that one works peacefully for change within the system, trusts the legal process, and sets and achieves goals as a habit, are all alien concepts to my students who have real reasons to pervasively distrust and be fearful in their lives. My belief that "the pen is mightier than the sword" might suit an English teacher, but for her students, their true friends will physically fight for them and with them. Walking away or "backing down" from a fight is wrong to my students and shows weakness. Friends are more trusted than adults, law enforcement is to be feared, all authority is viewed with distrust, and any opportunity to steal means having something they never would have had otherwise. Besides, they have also been victims of theft, so their view is that sometimes it is their turn to get rather than lose something. During my initiation at the start of the school year, these attitudes resulted in behaviors that were daily instructional hurdles as fights broke out, focus was lost, and lesson plans were useless.

The reality is that, "researchers suspect that a range of chronic stresses that can accompany growing up in poverty—things like crowding, noise, violence, family turmoil or separation—impact the development of the brain in childhood and adolescence,"⁵ and the daily poor nutrition, hunger, and knowledge my students have that a parent who worries about paying the bills and who has run out of minutes on their *TracFone*, are the sad facts that translate into my needing to slip a power bar under a hungry student's paper or learn who their relatives are, so that I can somehow communicate to a parent who

cares, but cannot be reached by phone. My students need to learn that learning changes us, gives us choices, and changes our futures.

Through listening, close reading, viewing, and constructive dialog through Accountable Talk techniques, this unit is designed for my students to first interact with relatable biographies and have them make personal connections with these life stories. Their final product is the writing and sharing of their own fictitious autobiographies. It is designed for the teacher's role to be that of mentor, and for the learning to be achieved through the intentional action of providing models, feedback, peer support, and practice through the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction. The ultimate learning outcome is that my students will see themselves as the main character in their lives and capable of making sound choices with healthy outcomes, and that they might encounter the change that developing a growth mindset in their lives can create.

Objectives

In considering my students' need to view themselves as contributors to their own classroom culture, to be provided multiple authentic measures that ensure their success, and to allow them to be in-control and independent doers of their final product in the writing process, the objectives of this unit intend that students will:

1. Read, listen, view, and discuss selected relatable life stories of both fictitious characters and real people
2. Identify, analyze, and apply their understanding of story elements and characterization to the selections
3. Develop a growth mindset through scaffolded questioning and reflection so that they might grow confidence in their ability to make positive life choices
4. Utilize exemplar models to extract character choices and receive teacher feedback and peer support during the writing process, through the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction
5. Verbally express and exchange ideas as they collaborate constructively to create presentations of their fictitious autobiographies

The aim of the unit is to provide exposure to biographies that is highly appealing, so that reading and writing are enjoyable activities, and that they cultivate critical thinking skills and greater confidence in their ability to be self-regulated learners able to make choices that create positive change.

Narrative

Literature Changes Us

Protagonists, particularly those facing painful struggles, often serve as role models. However, though the students can often name and identify the character's traits, they miss that there is a relationship between the choices that are made and the resulting character traits and the change that occurs with that character. They need to connect that their own choices develop their character traits and can create change, too.

The focus of this research-based unit will be to cultivate and empower critical thinking while examining the life stories of others and transfer that understanding to ourselves. While examining the lives of others, we make the connection that actions are choices that are made with thoughts, words, motivations, and feelings. These choices develop character traits and determine the course of our lives. The goal of any school should not be limited to achieving proficiency, but helping students to become independent, self-regulated learners, or as fellow educator Terry Heick phrases it in *Creating a Culture of 'Can,'* "An 'enabled' learner can grasp macro views, uncover micro details, ask questions, plan for new knowledge and transfer thinking across divergent circumstances." According to Heick, the book *Developing Minds*, edited by Art Costa, the suggestions for "promoting cognition and metacognition, include 'creating a safe environment, following students' thinking, and teaching questions rather than answers.'" The implication is that learning must have emotional roots and recommends, "One broad approach to teaching that works nearly every single time – is the gradual release of responsibility model." The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model is often summarized as "show me, help me, let me."⁶ "Research clearly shows the success of gradual release of responsibility models of instruction in which teachers model the use of a strategy, then have students use it with teacher guidance (*Literacy Implementation Guidance for the ELA Common Core Standards*)."⁷

Choices Create Change

While teaching English Language Arts to middle school students in the past, there has been engagement when we met characters in literature who became real to us and emerged from difficult situations and roadblocks in life transformed into strong, successful, and sometimes heroic people. This is a unifying human experience; the facing and overcoming of challenges shows us inspiration, hope, perseverance, and resiliency. We learn about ourselves through fiction. I want my students to learn about themselves through knowing that their thoughts, words, feelings, motivations, and actions are all chosen, and can be realigned, when we choose to.

Despite the fact that challenges will present themselves in life, and especially in the lives of at-risk adolescents, "Some youth remain well-adapted and thrive; a term referred to as resilient. Resilience can be defined as the ability to cope and persevere through stressful situations and can also be looked at as adaptive behavior. Resilience refers to doing well, despite adversity."⁸ According to the researchers, these resilient behaviors

are not an inherent part of someone's personality, but can be cultivated through personal and social development, particularly when introducing a focus on the development of character traits. Exploring biographies using the Gradual Release of Responsibility Instructional Framework allows for not just student engagement, but also student interaction. The model is built on several learning theories, including Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bandura, among others. It recognizes the "value of interaction and how learners must use language to learn" and so that "students are apprenticed in disciplinary thinking and academic language because learning occurs through interactions with others."⁹ In their book, *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching*, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey expand on the model to include four instructional components: Focus Lessons, Guided Instruction, Productive Group Work, and Independent Learning. The components may be used in any order, but every lesson should contain all four.¹⁰

The consensus among educational researchers supports how metacognition or teaching our students to think is best achieved. "Students developing higher-order thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills engage in active learning situations such as debates, panel discussions, role-playing and projects. Learners analyze, interpret and apply information; define issues and problems; Determine priorities; anticipate possible outcomes and make decisions. The recommendations are that, "Educational experiences should demonstrate ways of thinking, provide curricula organized to generate interest and teach strategies for organizing, questioning and processing information."¹¹ The need for instruction to allow for student interaction that requires them to utilize the academic vocabulary helps to develop their thinking within a content area. And precise, strategic questioning is essential to facilitate student understanding. "Middle schools should provide opportunities for educators and young adolescents to interact socially and engage in meaningful dialogue. Schools restructured to emphasize thinking use questioning as a valuable tool for making meaning of thoughts and for developing competencies. Students in such an environment interact with the school curriculum and offer responses after thoughtful consideration."¹²

Teaching Strategies

Recommended research-based instructional strategies are designed within the instructional framework of the Gradual Release of Responsibility and include:

- **Accountable Talk:** A framework for teaching students about discourse in order to enrich interactions
- **Literacy Stations** accommodate for instructional interruptions, (absences, tardy arrivals, early dismissals, and suspensions), differentiate among reading abilities, sustain attention for small segments of time, provide audio support and graphic organizers, peer editing and conferences, and break a 90 minute class time into activities that allow for interaction.

- RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) Writing
- Learner-Centered Multimodal presentations

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Unit Introduction

The introductory lesson begins with the “I Do It” Direct Instruction or Focus Lesson component and utilizes direct instruction to establish a safe environment that allows the teacher to follow the students’ thinking. The picture book, Scaredy Squirrel, by Melanie Watt is read orally utilizing a projector or SmartBoard. It is a Think Aloud and modeling activity that has the purpose of allowing the teacher to “show” story elements and character traits through a humorous, yet relatable picture book with the themes of individuality and a closed mindset resistant to change, while revealing the character’s behaviors are based on fear.

Following the reading, the “We Do It” Guided Instruction component involves interactive instruction as the teacher and students identify and discuss the character’s personality, behavior, and fears through scaffolded questioning with the teacher prompting students to use context clues, ask questions to clarify, and wonder about the character.

The “You Do It Independently” Independent Learning component is a Quick Write in which the students write down any fears they might have, or fears they know their parents or friends have, on an index card. The teacher collects student responses and their names are kept confidential. A discussion follows with questioning from the teacher that is precise and allows the students to connect with the story and conclude that all people share the human experience of having fears. Sample questions include: Is there conflict in the story? (Yes, Scaredy Squirrel has internal conflict) What Point of View is the story written from? What is the Author’s Purpose or purposes? Why is he afraid of a variety of things? Does he know why he is fearful of some things, or does he know and just not say? How important is it for him to know why he is afraid? What does he do about his fears? Does avoiding what he fears work? What is he really afraid of and what does he call it? (“The Unknown”) Questioning may lead the students to wondering, rather than exact answers, with the teacher utilizing Think-Aloud strategies, providing affirmation and feedback, and allowing students to share their own stories.

The “You Do It Together” Collaborative Learning component or Productive Group Work time involves partner work. Each group of two students reads together, and completes their individual Mindset Check-Up Questionnaire.¹³ The partners compare and discuss their ratings after completion. This is the entry ticket to the unit and will later be compared to the exit ticket when the unit is completed.

Culminating Activity: Students view two video clips through the website Mindset Works, *Michael Jordan* and *Embracing Failures*.¹⁴

Activity 2: Biography Literacy Stations

To more fully encounter positive role models who inspire while also developing a growth mindset, the students will progress through nine literacy stations that are differentiated for literacy skill levels. Activities are designed to be collaborative and may be completed with a partner, small group, or if needed, individually. An extension menu is used to assign and organize groupings. Each station has an accompanying graphic organizer or quick-write that is completed as productive group work and is collaborative in nature. (See Appendix B)

Students will utilize Accountable Talk sentence starters for their discussions. Accountable talk is a framework used for teaching students about having positive discourse. It was first developed by Lauren Resnick and a team of researchers at the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, and describes the agreements a class commits to as they participate in partner conversations. The essentials include “staying on topic, using information that is accurate and appropriate for the topic, and thinking deeply about what the partner has to say. Students are taught to be accountable for the content and to one another, and they learn techniques for keeping the conversation moving forward, toward a richer understanding of the topic at hand.”¹⁵ There are five indicators of Accountable Talk, which are familiar to the students at this point in the year. There are visual reminders of Accountable Talk displayed in the classroom. (See Appendix C)

Activity 3: Writing and Editing Fictitious Autobiographies

Students are given a variety of choices for how they might write their fictitious autobiographies, referred to on the Extension Menu as the “Future You.” Using the RAFT writing model¹⁶ and a graphic organizer and the character maps that they have created during the Literacy Station, the students are encouraged to: “Plan your RAFT for you to float into the future of your dreams. Write your autobiography. Just make things up. Remember, it’s your present that is the gift for you to choose to open the way you want it to. Remember History is “His Story” but you are writing your future.” They may choose to write in class or at home, and either type their autobiographies on the computer or handwrite them. They are also given minimal written requirements and a grading rubric. Some Special Education students are given the accommodation to dictate their story to a scribe, who will then type their orally given stories. All students will peer edit another student’s autobiography using the Sound Board Feedback Form for Writing¹⁷

Students may also elect to have their autobiography be confidentially and anonymously peer-edited by having it numbered.

Students are asked to hand in a first draft of a writing assignment. Each of their papers are photocopied and identified with a number instead of the student's name. Students who are volunteer editors in the class are given an anonymous paper to edit, and are given both verbal and written guidelines for editing criteria. After the students edit a paper, each student receives the anonymous feedback from his or her unknown peer editor. A class discussion about how this process worked for everyone is conducted after each student is returned the edited paper. (See Appendix D)

Activity 4: Sharing Fictitious Autobiographies

Students collaboratively help one another complete multimodal presentations of their fictitious autobiographies. Among the many options for creating a presentation are: PowerPoint with sound and music, StoryCorps¹⁸ audio recordings, animated video retellings through the website goanimate.com, dramatic presentations in character, interactive interviews conducted by a peer, folk tale retellings, photo booths to allow classmates to be photographed with them and their symbolic props, and self-portraits. Any creative option is allowed. A school day is set-aside for our Future You Celebration when other classes are invited to come and meet the students' fictitious future selves.

Exit Ticket for Unit: Train-Ugly-Mindset-Check-Up and Personal Reflection in Journals

Appendix A Common Core English Language Arts State Standards

Reading: Literature and Informational Text

RL.6.1/RI.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.6.2/RI.6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments

RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

RI.6.3 Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone

RI.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

RI.6.5 Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

RL.6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

RI.6.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

RL.6.7 Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

RI.6.7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

RI.6.9 Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).

Writing

W.6.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.6.5 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.

W.6.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

W.6.9A Apply *grade 6 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast texts

in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics").

Speaking and Listening

SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.6.1.B Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

SL.6.1.C Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

SL.6.1.D Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

SL.6.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explains how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

SL.6.5 Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

SL.6.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Language

L.6.1.E Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.

L.6.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

L.6.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

L.6.3.A Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style

L.6.3.B Maintain consistency in style and tone.

SL.6.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

SL.6.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Appendix B Biography Literacy Stations Extension Menu

Biography Literacy Stations

(* = required)

Remember to complete the graphic organizer or Quick-Write for each station.

1. Listen to the NPR Fresh Air interview excerpt between Terry Gross and Jay-Z.	2. Watch a Growth Mindset video or take the online Mindset Questionnaire.	3. Read/Listen to the story <i>Friends In Paris Kanye West & Jay-Z</i> by Bianca Bosso.
4. Read/Listen/View selected biographies.	5. *Writing RAFT Time Write or type your fictitious autobiography. (It may be written outside of class.)	6. Read/Listen/Watch the <i>StoryCorps</i> story <i>Eyes on the Stars</i> .
7. *Pre-Writing: Construct and Create a Character Map for the Future You.	8. Read/Listen to Mrs. M.'s fictitious autobiography.	9. Create a Wordle or Six Word Memoir about the Future You.

Appendix C Accountable Talk Indicators

Accountable Talk Indicators
1. Press for clarification and explanation (e.g., “Could you describe what you mean?”).
2. Require justification of proposals and challenges (e.g., “Where did you find that information?”).
3. Recognize and challenge misconception (e.g., “I don’t agree, because _____.”).
4. Demand evidence for claims and arguments (e.g., “Can you give me an example?”).
5. Interpret and use one another’s statements (e.g., “I think David’s saying _____, in which case, maybe we should _____.”).

Appendix D Sound Board Feedback Form For Writing

Sound Board Feedback Form for Writing	
Writer(s): _____	Reader(s): _____
Date: _____	Title or Topic: _____
1. Writer: Please read your piece to the reader, or explain the idea you have for a piece you will be writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Sounding Board: After listening, retell the main points to the writer.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Sounding Board: What did you like best?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Sounding Board: Ask questions about any parts you don't understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Writer: What new ideas do you have because of this conversation?	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Notes

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¹¹ Robert Lucking, Robert H. MacDonald, and Lee M. Manning. "What Works in Urban Middle Schools," *Childhood Education* (1995), 71, 221.

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Curriculum Unit Title

**Meeting Ourselves in Literature:
How Do Choices Create a Character?**

Author

Marcy Mehdizadeh

KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

Scientific research demonstrates that qualities such as intelligence, abilities, and talents are not fixed, but can grow. How people view themselves and their world impacts the choices they make. Interacting with relatable non-fiction and fictitious biographies creates personal connections with readers. Writing fictitious biographies creates an opportunity for writers to see themselves as the main character, capable of making sound choices and creating positive change.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

- (1) What is a growth mindset, and what is my mindset toward life and myself?
- (2) How do the choices characters (and people) make create change?
- (3) What can I imagine I would want a future me to be?

CONCEPT A

Defining, analyzing, and developing a growth mindset

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

What is a mindset? How can a mindset change and grow? What is the connection between a mindset and the choices made?

VOCABULARY A

Mindset, growth, fixed, givens, developed, nature, nurture, environment, qualities, resilience, Accountable Talk, strategies

CONCEPT B

Critiquing the choices others make and connecting them to our own lives

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

What can a reader learn about their own identity from reading the stories and experiences of others? How do writers use facts and opinions to construct biographies, autobiographies and memoirs?

VOCABULARY A

Academic Vocabulary – Biography, autobiography, memoir, main idea, character, setting, conflict, plot, theme, dialogue, chronological order, perspective, point of view, literary elements, figurative language, inference, purpose, style, cultural values, context, elaboration

CONCEPT C

Designing and creating a fictitious autobiography

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

How can I apply literary elements to design and write my own fictitious autobiography?

VOCABULARY A

RAFT writing model, Sound Board Feedback, edit, reflection

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

- <http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/>
- <http://www.mindsetworks.com/webnav/whatismindset.aspx>
- <http://trainugly.com/growth-mindset-hub/>
- <https://www.mindsetworks.com/webnav/videogallery.aspx>
- <http://derekhoopergolf.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Train-Ugly-Mindset-Check-Up.pdf>
- <https://storycorps.org/?s=stars>