Supporting Identity through Creative Writing: A Curriculum

Caleb Ehrenhaft , '25

Supporting Identity through Creative Writing: A Curriculum
Caleb Ehrenhaft
Swarthmore College
Thesis for Special Major in Educational Studies and English
May 10, 2024

Introduction

Although the Pennsylvania Board of Education does list narrative-telling as a foundational skill students should learn in its guidelines for secondary school writing education, its rationale for doing so is flawed. According to the Narrative Focus section of the State Academic Standards for English Language Arts, students should design their narratives to "engage and orient the[ir] reader[s] by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters" (stateboard.education.pa.gov). Most of the writing schools expect students to do in high school aims to prepare them for future academic and professional settings. Not only does this kind of academic, formal writing ensure students have fundamental writing skills they will use in the future, it also gives them an opportunity to flex their analytic muscles and forces them to think critically.

However, at times, this writing can feel performative. In other words, rather than presenting writing as a tool students can use to develop and express their thoughts, writing can sometimes be framed as a way for students to impress, prove their intellect, or achieve success in the professional and academic worlds. Furthermore, much of the writing students do mainly revolves around highlighting and analyzing other people's ideas (scholars, academics, writers), rather than developing and explaining their own thoughts. While writing is certainly a means of academic and professional achievement and a necessary skill to learn in order to navigate the world post-graduation, I had hoped that if there was one place where the PA Board of Education would have recognized writing's unique ability to shape one's identity and empower individuals to discover and communicate their own stories and thoughts to the world, it would be in the Narrative section of the State Academic Standards. Unfortunately, rather than highlighting the

formative role the writing of narratives and stories can play during a critical time of a young person's life, the PA Department of Education misplaces the focus of narrative writing on the audience rather than the writer themself.

The teaching of writing as a performative tool limits its potential to aid students' development as people and thinkers. In her article "Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator," Lisa Delpit discusses a fundamental debate in writing pedagogy. This debate centers around which is more important, teaching students, especially Black students and other students of color, technical writing skills that will help them to survive and succeed in a country where systemic racism has existed for centuries, or emphasizing a process-oriented approach where identity and thought expression are emphasized and valued over technical writing skills. Delpit advocates for a combination of the two approaches rather than arguing one should be taught over the other. She acknowledges the benefits of teaching writing in a culturally responsive way that fosters identity development while recognizing the need for students, particularly students from marginalized communities, to receive skill-based instruction that they may not have access to in their communities. While I agree with Delpit that both schools of thought should have a place in writing pedagogy, I choose to focus on the process and identity-building approach in this curriculum, which I have named *Reflective Storytelling*, for several reasons. Most importantly, I believe that giving students an academic space devoted to this kind of identity-focused writing will assist students in better understanding how they think, feel, and act and as a result lead them to more readily understand and empathize with their peers and the world around them. Furthermore, by reframing the purpose of writing as an expressive and reflective process rather than a performative one, I hope to change or complicate the ways in which many high school students typically think of writing.

Curriculum Considerations

In terms of the students *Reflective Storytelling* targets, I do not envision there being a particular demographic or even interest group that the curriculum will favor or be geared towards. My goal is to create a curriculum and environment where any student, regardless of background or interests, can develop and grow as a writer. Of course, although this will be the environment I hope to achieve, it is important to recognize ways in which particular students may feel advantaged or disadvantaged in their relationships with my curriculum and classroom. Immediately, my mind goes to students whose first language is not English. Writing academically in a second language is a challenge for many people and can feel restrictive. I believe creative writing is an area where multilingual students can make fuller use of their entire linguistic repertoires. In the various writing workshops I have taken as a student, I have encountered multilingual writing on several occasions. By "multilingual writing," I mean written works that make use of two or more languages, either in minor ways, such as the inclusion of certain Spanish words in a piece that is mainly in English, or in more major ways, such as including large chunks of dialogue in a non-English language. This concept closely relates to the concept of *translanguaging*. In translanguaging framework, "the perspective of racialized bi/multilingual communities [is] the norm, rather than the exception" (Flores 2022, p. xix). Instead of establishing strictly-defined boundaries between languages, translanguaging takes a person-first view of language that acknowledges the vast linguistic repertoires multilingual individuals have at their disposal (Flores 2022).

Clearly, I am placing English as the "standard" of sorts in terms of language. I do this not because I feel it is of higher value than other languages but simply because I envision teaching

Reflective Storytelling in a US setting, where English is the most common language. Students who speak English as a second language certainly are aware of the ways in which many Americans expect their peers to speak English. Cenoz and Gorter discuss how the teaching of English language and writing in American schools often forces multilingual students to isolate and distance English from other languages in their linguistic repertoires and school curriculum (Cenoz and Gorter 2013). Not only does this practice make many ESOL students feel othered and a step behind their peers, it only makes use of a small part of multilingual students' linguistic repertoires. In other words, it forces students to ignore or repress part of their knowledge bases.

Now, because in *Reflective Storytelling*, students will be asked to write in mostly English, with the understanding that they will be shown ways in which other languages can be incorporated into creative works (for example, by reading and discussing writers such as Junot Diaz or Julia Alvarez), they should come into the course with a degree of fluency in English. Understanding a language is a good first step in terms of experimenting with and manipulating the language in artistic ways. However, I do not think students must be completely fluent in, or use as their default language, standardized American English. Dialectical differences should not inhibit one's ability to write creatively in an educational setting. However, students often feel they must write in a certain academic, objective tone, especially at school, in order for others to take their work seriously. Of course, this phenomenon is not limited to writing. Code-switching is something many students contend with on a daily basis at school. However, unlike with verbal code-switching, where students have opportunities to use their natural dialects or voices either at home or with friends outside of the classroom, many young students never get the chance to write in a voice that feels authentic to who they are. As Lippi-Green discusses in *English with an Accent*, "the myth of standard language persists because it is carefully tended and propagated,

with huge, almost universal success, so that language, the most fundamental of human social-ization tools, becomes a commodity" (Lippi-Green 2012, p. 61). This is doubly the case with writing. Students learn that they must write clearly, concisely, and avoid using first or second person in their academic essays and papers. Dedicating a course and space for students to discover and reflect upon their voices as writers would provide them with an opportunity to develop a more personal relationship with writing.

Reflectivity in Creative Processes

In my own experience, writing has often served a therapeutic role during moments of stress, loss, and anxiety. For me, writing has a uniquely vulnerable quality. Sitting in front of a blank page forces us to look inwardly and reflect on their fears, joys, hopes, and failures. The act of writing vulnerably by drawing on our own experiences teaches us to recognize and reflect on the ways in which our minds work. Journaling is one way of practicing reflection, however, the practice of writing narratives and stories should not be overlooked as a means of achieving better self-understanding and emotional literacy. Stories are not just descriptions of a sequence of events. Oftentimes, they are built upon or at the very least influenced by meaningful, and at times traumatic, moments in writers' lives. In this way, the writing of stories and narratives can serve as a way for us, as writers, to process and address the underlying effects traumatic or impactful moments in our lives have had on us as people overall. Rather than telling students to write a story and explain its significance to an audience, which more often than not in a school setting only consists of a single teacher, we should be encouraging students to reflect on how the stories they wish to tell influence how they view themselves and their own life experience.

The notion of audience is another complicated part of writing pedagogy. Although English Literature courses often present writing as a performative act, the audience that students write for is often limited to their teacher. As a result, students concern themselves more with writing in a manner that their teacher will like and give them a good grade for rather than writing in a way that feels true to them. In high school, I can remember hearing fellow students on several occasions say things like "I need a week to figure out this English teacher so I can figure out how to get an A in their class." As I stated earlier, encouraging students to write for themselves is an important part of identity development. However, giving students opportunities for their words to be heard by a larger audience can help make the writing they do feel more real. In-class workshops, where students share and comment on each other's stories, are an example of how teachers can provide a broader concrete audience for students' writing. Once again, the goal of providing this larger audience is not to make students feel like they must write in a certain way in order for their stories and thoughts to be heard, but to help students realize that people care about what they have to say, encourage them to share their thoughts and unique stories, and understand that their peers have unique stories to share too. Providing students with a larger audience can aid identity development as well.

Although much of identity development revolves around the process of adolescents learning about the kind of person they want to be, most teenagers equally consider who or what they do not want to be (Way 2008). Whether they are aware of it or not, high schoolers' behavior and thinking is heavily influenced by their peers. Of course, every teenager is different, and the ways in which or the degree to which they alter their behavior based on social norms or trends varies. However, no student graduates high school as the same child who entered it four years earlier. External image and self-perception are deeply intertwined in many cases, especially for

adolescents (Way 2008). Adolescents' decision-making and general behavior are oftentimes influenced more by how they feel it will make their peers think of them as opposed to internal desires and thinking. Creative writing, when used correctly, can provide students with a space to think and create independently and more honestly than in many traditional high school settings. Ideally, when sitting in front of a blank page, one is able to put aside all external stressors and write what they feel like writing. Yet honest writing is more often than not influenced by people's interactions with others, their environments, and the larger world around them. The creative writing I want to teach does not aim to isolate students from their environments in order to look internally but to enable students to process how both internal and external factors shape them as people.

Students can reflect and process their own thoughts both about themselves and the world/environment around them through narrative writing. Throughout my admittedly brief teaching experience, I have seen and taught several different approaches to narrative writing. Based on my observations and experience, I break these approaches down into two categories: story-telling and identity-building. With the story-telling approach, students are prompted to think of an event in their lives and write a brief account of the event and how it made them feel. Emphasis is typically placed on providing vivid details to help students' readers visualize and feel what the students saw and felt during the events they write about. A much smaller emphasis is placed on why the events were meaningful to the students and why they chose to write about their respective events. In this approach, the focus is placed on the students' audience rather than the students themselves as people and as writers. Furthermore, from a creative writing perspective, the driving forces behind a good story are misunderstood. Character, more than anything else, is what makes a story interesting both from a writers' and readers' perspective, not

plot. A screenwriter named Craig Mazin once said that "if you follow strict structural guidelines in all likelihood you will write a very well-structured bad script" (Mazin 2019, p. 2). I believe this applies to all creative writing, including narrative writing. In my experience, when emphasis is placed on the structure and minutia of student narratives, they more often than not find little enjoyment in the writing process and little pride in the finished product. On the other hand, when narratives are taught and written through an identity-building lens, students typically find the process and result more meaningful. In an eleventh grade class I observed, students began a narrative unit by reflecting on who they are as people and then thinking about what events or parts of their lives they feel exemplify their core values, tenets, beliefs. Students wrote about important aspects of their cultures, meaningful relationships, and difficult obstacles that they felt both shaped and demonstrated who they are. One student wrote about his experience taking care of his younger sibling and mother, who struggled with addiction, from a young age and how that experience has shaped his identity. Not only did he describe what that experience looked like concretely, he reflected on how his values and morals as a son/brother drove his actions. Again, putting a creative writing/screenwriting lens on this narrative exercise, character is what drove these narratives rather than the stories or events the students wrote about. Ultimately, narrative and creative writing should feel productive and liberating for students, not restrictive.

Similarly, worldbuilding in fiction can provide students with a chance to explore and unpack aspects of their identity and community in a thoughtful, reflective manner. Fictional worldbuilding may vary drastically in terms of the physical appearance but most complex, meaningful worldbuilding draws on similar sources such as real-world relationships, observations, and structures. For example, in a third-grade class I taught, one of the projects we worked on was the creation of a short fiction book. The class began by working together to

create the protagonists of the story, two siblings named Timmy the Tiger and Lucky the Duck, and then after creating the general outline of the plot, they started to work on the world the story would take place in. Some of the choices they made may seem superficial and solely aesthetic at first glance, and in fact many of the choices students proposed or made began as mainly aesthetic ideas (i.e. a world made out of pizza, a cloaked villain, etc.). However, after I prompted them to think about why a world might be made out of pizza or why the villain was wearing a cloak, they came up with rich and intriguing details that both gave meaning to the story and insight into the students' views of the world around them and the people that populate it. They decided that while the pizza world might appear to be idyllic and wondrous, it actually was home to parallel versions of the protagonists, Timmy and Lucky, and antagonist, Edward the Bull. In the "real world" of the story, Edward the Bull is the cruel bully of brothers Timmy and Lucky. But one day, as they watch TV at home, Timmy and Lucky are sucked into a portal that transports them to Pizza Land, where they meet a cloaked figure who turns out to be a parallel universe's Edward the Bull. Pizza Land Edward wants to escape his world because he is tired and scared of his bullies, who later in the story are revealed to be parallel versions of Timmy and Lucky. While the students in my class did not outright present a set of themes they hoped their story would encapsulate, several themes did emerge over the course of the creation process such as friendship, understanding, empathy, and diversity of perspective. By creating a story with a rich, complex world, my third-grade students had the opportunity to reflect on the real world and their own communities and relationships.

High school is a perfect time to give students the chance to reflect on themselves and their environments through worldbuilding and narrative-writing. Drawing on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson 1950), high schoolers often find themselves in a period of

identity and role confusion, where they might experience doubt about who they are and question where they belong socially and in the broader world. The storybuilding exercise for my third grade class may seem like an activity that would not easily translate to a classroom of older and relatively more mature students. Lots of high schoolers might roll their eyes at the idea of "Pizza Land" and Timmy the Tiger, however, I argue that high schoolers' maturity provides opportunities for creative writing to be a more meaningful, as well as enjoyable, endeavor. Of course, there is often a wide range of emotional and physical maturity across any high school population, yet this too provides an opportunity to encourage reflection and discourse through creative writing. When I use the term emotional maturity, I am generally referring to one's ability to recognize the source of their emotions and how their emotions present both internally and externally. In addition, emotional maturity includes recognizing how external forces affect the way one's self-perception and the way they present and express themselves around others. For example, in "To Be or Not to Be: An Exploration of Ethnic Identity Development in Context," Way et al discuss how adolescents', particularly adolescents from minoritized ethnic groups, personal and social identities "[consist] of a process of resistance and accommodation to negative stereotypes projected on them by their peers" (Way et al 2008). Not only do adolescents struggle internally over who they are and what their interests are, they receive messages on a daily basis from peers, family, friends, and teachers regarding what society expects them to be and what society expects them to find interesting. For most individuals, high school is a time of intense social, emotional, and physical development. On top of that, many adolescents have to deal with planning for the future, whether that be going to college or entering the workforce, while simultaneously navigating the present (relationships, family, jobs, etc.).

Giving adolescents structured time to create and reflect through creative writing provides them with an opportunity to process and reflect on everything going on in their lives and the world around them. To be clear, creative writing, or at least good creative writing, is not meant to solely provide writers and readers with a distraction from real-world stress and anxiety. Good writing resonates with readers and writers alike because it depicts and discusses real-world conflicts, tensions, emotions, relationships, and more in a tangible way. *Star Wars*, which I include under the umbrella of creative writing, is more than just a cool laser show. It is a story of family, love, loss, and an argument that there exists good and evil in everyone. When George Lucas created the *Star Wars* universe, he did not just think about what the world of his story would look or sound like. He thought about how the humans, aliens, droids, jedi, sith, and everything else in it would interact with and feel about each other. Lucas's main characters give us, the audience, insight into not just who they are, but what their perceptions and feelings about the universe they live in say about the kind of environment it is. That is what I mean when I say worldbuilding. Worldbuilding is not just the act of designing a fictional sci-fi or fantasy or medieval world. It is developing characters that have complex, diverse experiences and relationships with the world they live in. This can apply to worlds based on reality too. If a student wants to set a story in their high school or home, great, they still have to bring the world to life by creating three-dimensional characters who have complex relationships with their environment and the other people in it. This process can help students better understand how they themselves think as well as how others think. Understanding how oneself and others think is the foundation of being able to empathize with others. Furthermore, when students read and hear about the worlds and stories their peers create during workshops, they are exposed to a multitude of diverse experiences and thoughts.

Overall, with *Reflective Storytelling*, I aim to provide students with a different way of approaching writing in an academic setting which will lead them to better understand how writing can serve as a means of reflection, expression, and identity-building. Exercises will be framed as generative, guiding aids rather than strict guidelines that students must follow. Students may at times need support during the writing process as well as the process of reflection and generation of stories. I view the teacher's role in this curriculum as a resource and guide that students can turn to for assistance rather than an ultimate source of knowledge who students must learn to think and write like. Furthermore, because students will be asked to be vulnerable in their writing, teachers should be prepared to be a support for their students themselves but also provide other supports outside of the classroom whom students can go to should they feel the need to. Finally, I want to reemphasize that I am not arguing that the type of writing instruction I describe here should replace skills-based writing instruction, but be used in tandem to provide a more holistic approach to writing than what currently exists in many schools.

Criticality in Creative Writing Pedagogy and Workshops

Sharing work, let alone subjecting it to the eyes and ears of their peers, can often feel vulnerable for students. Likewise, analyzing a peer's work through a critical lens can feel like dangerous ground for adolescents. Thoughts of "what if my writing is terrible?" or "I don't want to hurt this person's" feelings are commonplace in any workshop course regardless of the age of its participants. The first step in addressing these concerns is to clearly define what criticality looks like in the workshop process. As Hall notes in *Writers Workshop in a Book*, too often we associate the word "critical" with criticism and negativity (Hall 2007). Criticality in writing workshops does not simply consist of pointing out everything wrong with someone else's writing

nor does it solely place focus on a given workshop story and its author. Engaging critically with a peer's work means being willing to understand the perspective of its writer and acknowledging the ways in which our own biases and identities affect our interpretation of the work. Hall notes how "the more thoroughly you read the manuscripts of others, the better your own editorial eye will become, and this, above all, is what you take back to your own work" (Hall 2007). That is the beauty of a workshop made up of writers. As we critically analyze the work of other writers, we are able to see patterns and themes in our own writing.

Students will be asked to approach readings for the course with the same critical eye. Readings for the course are not meant to provide students with gold-standard, perfect examples of creative writing that they should strive to imitate in their own writing. Readings are meant to introduce students to new perspectives, techniques, and voices. If in a given week they find a particular reading or an author that they resonate with, great. If they read a story and hate it, that is alright too. When I first decided to try writing fiction myself, an author told me to begin by reading. At this point, I was a high schooler who frankly was tired of reading. I had read Dickens, Austen, Chaucer, and more all throughout high school up to that point. I felt my stamina for reading was far lower than my excitement to try writing myself. However, the author recommended books to me by authors I had never heard of. Authors that made me realize that I could write using whatever voice I wanted to. Authors that wrote in a way that I understood. I knew what happened in the books I read in school and I knew why we read them but rarely did I relate to them. Additionally, as I began reading again without the threat of an essay or quiz looming over my head, I began to form more personal relationships with the stories I read. Students in this course will be encouraged to do the same.

Reflective Storytelling Introduction

As I transition into an overview of the curriculum and sample lessons for the course, I would like to acknowledge the ways in which Gholdy Muhammad's Five Pursuits (identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy) guided my curriculum design. As I was once a high school student in a creative writing course, I am well aware of common perceptions, relating to creative writing classes, many students come into the course with. I could go on and on about the kind of things I heard my classmates (and admittedly I as well) would say about my high school's creative writing class (which was available only to one small section of juniors and seniors each semester). Instead, I will summarize them with one term: "an easy A". Because of the stress high schoolers feel as students, the idea of taking a course where participation is enough to get one an A is an appealing one. However, writing, especially creative writing, is difficult. The work students will be asked to do in this course will be difficult. It will require each individual to look internally and reflect on who they are as people, as writers, as students, as sisters, as sons and think about the many different factors that have shaped their lives (identity). It will require them to learn the intricacies and techniques of storytelling and make use of them in their own writing (intellect and skills). It will ask them to be honest with themselves and to immerse themselves in the stories and worlds of their classmates (criticality). But ultimately, through this process, students should feel a sense of pride in the work they complete over the course of a semester and enjoy the opportunity to share and connect with their peers through story and character (joy).

Reflective Storytelling **Overview**

***Text Bank for Course*:** *The following texts will serve as a base catalog for readings. Depending on student interests and class discussions, reading selections will vary slightly from year to year. Other non-textual mediums will be used to generate discussion as well such as movies, TV, and artwork. Suggested readings/media will be listed for each week.*

- *Unearthing Joy* – Gholdy Muhammad
- "Contamination" – Chinelo Okparanta
- "A Temporary Matter" – Jhumpa Lahiri
- "Nilda" – Junot Diaz
- "Pet Fly" – Walter Mosley
- *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* – Stephen King
- *Joker* – Todd Phillips
- *Black Panther* – Ryan Coogler
- *Parasite* – Bong Joon-Ho
- "Farmer Giles of Ham" – J.R.R Tolkien
- "Victory Lap" – George Saunders
- *American Fiction* – Cord Jefferson
- "Moments Earlier" – Kate Doyle
- "My Country is a Ghost" – Eugenia Triantafyllou
- *The Lorax* – Dr. Seuss
- *The Light Within You* – Namita Moolani Mehra
- "Making Workshops Work" – Sands Hall
- *How I Became a Famous Novelist* – Steve Hely
- *Community* – Dan Harmon
- *Encanto* – Jared Bush et al.
- "Girl" – Jamaica Kincaid
- "The Swimmer" – John Cheever

This curriculum is designed for a block schedule.
GQs = Guiding Questions

WEEK	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
WEEK ONE: Introduction and Why Tell Stories? Suggested readings/media: ● Excerpts from *Unearthing Joy* – Gholdy Muhammad ● "Nilda" – Junot Diaz	**Metacognition in Writing** <u>GQs</u>: What different genres of writing exist? Why is reflection important? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Mini-lesson and discussion: Students will discuss in small groups/pairs their own relationships with writing and examine different forms of writing. <u>ASSIGNMENT:</u> Students will write a brief reflection on their relationships with reading/writing and stories in general. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (identity, criticality)	**Why Tell Stories?** <u>GQs:</u> What is the purpose of telling stories? How can we use writing to reflect on our own experiences? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Exploration of different modes of storytelling (both historical and contemporary. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (identity, intellect)	**Elements of Fiction** <u>GQs</u>: What are the essential components of a story? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Overview of semester through an exploration of the core components of fiction/story. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (skills, intellect)
WEEK TWO: Character Suggested readings/media: ● "Moments Earlier" – Kate Doyle ● "Farmer Giles of Ham" – J.R.R. Tolkien ● "A Temporary Matter" – Jhumpa Lahiri ● *The Light Within You* – Namita Moolani Mehra	**Character as a Catalyst for Story** <u>GQs</u>: What is character (in general and in fiction)? What drives story: plot or character? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Lecture on character	**Characters Beyond the Page** <u>GQs</u>: What makes a character intriguing? What does it mean to have a two or three-dimensional character? How can self-reflection aid character	**Foils** <u>GQs</u>: What is a foil? Why is it important to understand how two people/characters relate to each other? How can we learn about ourselves through other people and

	being the basis for story rather than plot. Students will discuss how character(s) form the basis of a story. PURSUITS: (joy, identity, skills, criticality)	development? STRUCTURE: Character assessments. Students will group up and analyze characters from "Moments Earlier" by Kate Doyle. What/how does the author tell us about who these characters are? ASSIGNMENT: Students will create a fictional character biography. PURSUITS: (criticality, skills, intellect)	vice-versa? STRUCTURE: Defining what a foil is as a class and discussing what role foils play in fiction/storytelling. Students will then brainstorm sample foil characters (for their biography character) individually and discuss them with a partner. PURSUITS: (identity, joy, criticality, skills)
WEEK THREE: Voice and POV Suggested readings/media: ● "The Swimmer" – John Cheever ● "Pet Fly" – Walter Mosley ● "Girl" – Jamaica Kincaid	**Language and Dialect** GQs: Do people write and talk the same way? How do language/dialect/culture influence writing? STRUCTURE: Exploration of different dialects. Brief linguistics lesson centered around how language and dialect influence/relate to culture and perceptions of identity. As a class, we will then analyze sample characters linguistically. PURSUITS: (identity, criticality,	**Intentionality in POV Choices** GQs: What different kinds of POV are there in fiction? STRUCTURE: Exploration/explanation of different kinds of POV in fiction (first person, third person close, third person omniscient, etc.). Students will then write a sample scene de–scription. First, in one POV. Then, they will rewrite the same scene using a different POV. ASSIGNMENT: Finish scenes (if	**Whose Story?** GQs: How does POV and Voice affect the way we perceive stories? What is an unreliable narrator? STRUCTURE: Using the scenes from last class, students will now think about how to combine/play with different voices and POVs. Following the activity, students will discuss in small groups the various considerations one must take when writing in different voices and POVs. PURSUITS:

	skills)	needed). <u>PURSUITS:</u> (skills, criticality, intellect)	(joy, skills, criticality)
WEEK FOUR: Setting Suggested readings/media ● *Black Panther* – Ryan Coogler ● *Parasite* – Bong Joon-Ho ● *Joker* – Todd Phillips ● "My Country is a Ghost" – Eugenia Triantafyllou	**Immersion** <u>GQs</u>: What aspects of setting are most important to you? How can we use writing to vividly immerse readers in a setting? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Presentation on aspects of setting (location, time period, five senses, etc.). The class will then discuss what aspects the readings for class focused on and how effectively the authors painted a picture of the setting of their respective story. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (criticality, intellect, skills)	**Identity and Setting** <u>GQs</u>: How does the environment one grows up in affect who they are? Nature or Nurture? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Students will write about locations/places/settings from their lives that are meaningful or pleasurable to them and reflect on what aspects make these locations special to them. Then, they will think about locations/places/settings that they do not find enjoyable and reflect on why they do not like these locations. Students will then pair up and compare and contrast the aspects of the places they wrote about. <u>ASSIGNMENT:</u> Students will begin to map out the setting of their first workshop story. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (criticality, identity, joy)	**Setting as a Character** <u>GQs</u>: How do characters interact with setting? How are setting and character intertwined? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> As a class, we will analyze several different stories through the lenses of setting and character (*Parasite*, *Black Panther*, and *Joker*). Students will discuss in small groups what the settings of the excerpts/scenes from these stories say about the characters and how the characters inform us about the environment they live in. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (joy, identity, criticality, skills)

| WEEK FIVE:
Plot

Suggested readings/media:
● "Shape of Story" – Kurt Vonnegut
● *Community* – Dan Harmon
● *Encanto* – Jared Bush et al.
● *The Lorax* – Dr. Seuss | **Shape of Story**

GQs:
What are typical plot structures? What are different "shapes" to story?

STRUCTURE:
As a class, watch and discuss Kurt Vonnegut's "Shape of Story" talk. Then, discuss the readings for class using Vonnegut's graph.

Vonnegut Shape of Story Graph

ASSIGNMENT:
Outline for first workshop story!

PURSUITS:
(skills, intellect, criticality) | **Expectation Subversion**

GQs:
What does it mean to subvert expectations? Should all good stories subvert expectations?

STRUCTURE:
Presentation on expectation subversion. Analysis of reading through the lens of expectation. Class will then watch and discuss scenes from *Community* and *Encanto*.

PURSUITS:
(criticality, intellect, joy) | **Starting Blocks of Story**

GQs:
In what ways can we map plot to help with the writing of stories?

STRUCTURE:
Using Vonnegut's graph to generate ideas. Core story beat walkthrough (opening, inciting incident, rising action, climax, etc.). Students will have time in class to begin thinking about the core beats of their workshop 1 story and finish their outlines.

PURSUITS:
(skills, joy, intellect) |
| WEEK SIX:
Point of Telling

Suggested readings/media:
● "Contamination" – Chinelo Okparanta
● *How I Became a Famous Novelist* – Steve Hely | **When to Tell Stories**

GQs:
What is point of telling? How is it different from POV? How does point of telling relate to other core fiction elements? How can writers use these elements in different ways?

STRUCTURE:
Presentation on point of telling. Comparison to POV. Exploration into how *when* you tell a story in relation to the events described affects voice, | **Why Now?**

GQs:
How does point of telling affect the content of a story?

STRUCTURE:
Prompt exercise. Students will either pick a point of telling and think of what emotions fit the point of telling may evoke or pick an emotion (anger, joy, anxiety, etc.) and decide what point of telling can be used to evoke the emotion they choose. The class will do an | **Perspective and Point of Telling**

GQs:
How does time change perspective?

STRUCTURE:
Discussion of three readings from over the course of the semester. One with an old, one with a middle-aged, and one with a young protagonist. What conclusions can we draw about these characters based on the point of telling |

		example together first. Then, students will write short scenes and then pair up to discuss the process and products they produced. PURSUITS: (joy, skills, criticality)	the author chose to write from. ASSIGNMENT: Workshop 1 Story! PURSUITS: (identity, joy, criticality, skills)

| **WEEK SEVEN:**
Workshop Week 1

Suggested readings/media:
● "Making Workshops Work" – Sands Hall | **Establishing Our Workshop Space**

GQs:
What makes feedback productive? What does the workshop process look like?

STRUCTURE:
Discuss workshop process and establish standards for our workshop as a class. Mock workshop. As a class, workshop an author's piece. Discuss how the process feels and what kind of feedback is especially useful.

ASSIGNMENT:
Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.)

PURSUITS:
(skills, intellect) | **Workshop Day 1:**

Workshop stories!

ASSIGNMENT:
Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.)

PURSUITS:
(criticality, identity, joy, skills) | **Workshop Day 2:**

Workshop stories!

ASSIGNMENT:
Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.)

PURSUITS:
(criticality, identity, joy, skills) |
| **WEEK EIGHT:** | **Workshop Day 3:** | **Workshop Day 4:** | **Workshop Day 5:** |

Workshop Week 2 Suggested readings/media: ● "Making Workshops Work" – Sands Hall	Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)	Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)	Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)
WEEK NINE: Reflection and Review Suggested readings/media: ● *Unearthing Joy* – Gholdy Muhammad ● "Making Workshops Work" – Sands Hall	**Check In** GQs: How did the first round of workshops feel? What went well? What do you want to keep in mind as we go into the next round of workshops? STRUCTURE: Before and after discussing these questions as a group, students will have the chance to reflect on their own in a free-write style piece. ASSIGNMENT: Finish free-write reflection. PURSUITS: (criticality, skills)	**Self-Workshop** GQs: What feedback would you give to yourself before writing your next workshop piece? STRUCTURE: Each student will meet with teacher to discuss their first workshop story. While students wait for their turn, they can either brainstorm/work on their next stories, free-write, or work from a free-write prompt. Students will turn in their work at the end of class. PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, skills, joy)	**Where to Go Now?** GQs: What kind of story do you want to write next? Do you want it to continue exploring a genre or begin exploring a new one? STRUCTURE: Students will discuss the questions above in small groups or pairs and then share out. For the rest of the class, students will get the chance to work on their second workshop pieces and teacher will be available for questions. PURSUITS: (identity, skills, joy)

WEEK TEN: Workshop Week 3 Suggested readings/media: ● "Making Workshops Work" – Sands Hall	**Workshop Day 6:** Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)	**Workshop Day 7:** Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)	**Workshop Day 8:** Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)
WEEK ELEVEN: Workshop Week 4 Suggested readings/media: ● "Making Workshops Work" – Sands Hall	**Workshop Day 9:** Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)	**Workshop Day 10:** Workshop stories! ASSIGNMENT: Read stories for Workshop Day 1 and write up feedback. For authors: List the kind of feedback you are most interested in receiving (character, plot points, moments in story, etc.) PURSUITS: (criticality, identity, joy, skills)	**Workshop Reflection** GQs: What felt different/similar this week as opposed to the first week of workshops? Did you find the workshop process productive? STRUCTURE: Each student will meet with teacher to discuss their first workshop story. While students wait for their turn, they will write a flash fiction piece. Students will turn in their work at the end of class. PURSUITS: (criticality, identity,

			skills, joy)
WEEK TWELVE: Closing	**Back to the Beginning…** <u>GQs</u>: Why tell stories? What inspired you to write the pieces you wrote this semester? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Students will reflect on these questions individually and then discuss in small groups/pairs. <u>ASSIGNMENT:</u> Semester Reflection and Final Portfolio Edits <u>PURSUITS:</u> (identity, criticality, joy, skills)	**Why Write?** <u>GQs</u>: How can self-reflection and self-discovery lead to empathy? How does writing empower one's individual voice? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Putting the pieces together. Revisiting our day 1 questions. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (identity, criticality, intellect)	**Me and Writing** <u>GQs</u>: Has your relationship with writing changed at all over the course of the semester? <u>STRUCTURE:</u> Students will discuss in small groups/pairs their beginning of the year reflections. Then, students will write a brief response reflection to their past selves. <u>PURSUITS:</u> (identity, criticality)

SAMPLE LESSONS

<div align="center">

Week 2: Day 2

Bringing Characters to Life

</div>

Stage 1: Desired Results

Essential Questions ● What makes a character intriguing? ● What does it mean to have a two or three-dimensional character? ● How can self-reflection aid character development?	**Understandings** *Students will understand…* ● How self-reflection and understanding can help writers create intriguing fictional characters ● How empathy and perspective aid character creation ● How self-reflection enables one to empathize with and understand the perspectives of other people
Transfer Goals ● Create and write three-dimensional characters ● Use self-reflection to better understand themselves and connect with/understand the perspectives of others	**Knowledge and Skills** *Students will be able to…* ● Write brief character biographies ● Draw on character biographies for inspiration while writing stories ● Draw on their personal, real-world experience to inspire character creation ● Think from and draw on the perspectives of others when creating characters

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task(s):
- Students will work in small groups/pairs to create a brief character biography for a character of their choice from the readings for class
    - Goal: Create a brief biography for a character from the readings for class
    - Role: Students will play the roles of biographer, investigator, and writer as they look for evidence from readings to build the character biographies
    - Audience: Each pair/group will share out their character biography with the rest of the class
    - Situation: Collaborative class time → students will work with their partner(s) to make sense of the character they choose to study
    - Performance: Students will produce a brief character biography (bulleted list or prose)
    - Standards: PDE Standards 3, 4, and 5

Other Evidence:
- After "reverse engineering" a character biography from a reading in class, students will write a

character biography for an original character on their own for homework

Stage 3: Learning Plan

Learning Activities:
- Where: Students will use the character (and character biography) they produce for homework in their first workshop story
- Hook: Bringing characters to life through analyzing/reflecting on real-world "characters"
- Equip and Experience: Character biographies as a starting point for story creation and character understanding
- Rethink: Understanding/imagining/reflecting on the character biographies of real-world people in addition to fictional characters
- Evaluate: As groups/pairs share out their character biographies in class, the class will discuss the merit of and justification for the conclusions each group/pair made about their chosen character in their biography
- Tailor: Students will have the option to present their character biographies in whatever format they feel best enables them to describe their chosen character (bulleted list, narrative format, report, etc.). Teacher will provide examples of character biographies for students to refer to as they work
- Organize: Mini-lesson/discussion → activity → debrief/share out

Week 4: Day 3

Setting as a Character

Stage 1: Desired Results

Essential Questions	Understandings
● How do characters interact with setting? ● How are setting and character intertwined?	*Students will understand…* ● How where characters come from and live affect who they are ● How different people perceive given settings differently
Transfer Goals	**Knowledge and Skills**
● Consider setting when creating original characters ● Use personal experiences/emotions related to setting in order to find inspiration	*Students will be able to…* ● Analyze stories through the lenses of setting and character ● Understand what characters/people tell us about settings and vice versa ● Understand how emphasizing different elements of setting affects story

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task(s):
- Students will discuss in small groups/pairs several scenes from movies (*Parasite, Black Panther, and Joker*) and share their findings with the class regarding what the settings of the scenes say about the characters and what the characters tell the audience about the environment they live in.
  - Goal: Make observations about character-setting dynamics and use concrete examples from scenes as evidence
  - Role: Students will play the roles of investigator and critic as they assess what evidence supports their claims about character and setting and how effectively the films portray character-setting relationships
  - Audience: Each pair/group will share out their character biography with the rest of the class
  - Situation: Break out groups → class will watch each scene collectively, then groups/pairs can work either in the classroom or other spaces as they rewatch/discuss the scenes
  - Performance: Each group will produce written observations/claims about each scene with evidence to support their claims
  - Standards: PDE Standards 4 and 5

Other Evidence:
- Students will design/think about the settings of their first workshop stories and connect their

characters with the world around them

Stage 3: Learning Plan

Learning Activities:
- Where: Students will use the observations on setting they make in class to aid them in creating the settings of their first workshop stories
- Hook: How is setting itself a kind of character?
- Equip and Experience: Setting design as a way of understanding character better
- Rethink: How do real world settings affect people and vice versa?
- Evaluate: During the share-out portion of class, the class will discuss how and why each group/pair came to their conclusions about setting and character and think about both the merit of the conclusions and the potential dangers of making assumptions about people based on where they come from/live
- Tailor: Students will be able to select which scene they want to focus on in their group/partner work
- Organize: Presentation/viewing → group/partner work → debrief/discussion/share out

Week 7: Day 1

Establishing Our Workshop Space

Stage 1: Desired Results

Essential Questions	Understandings
● What makes feedback productive? ● What does the workshop process look like?	*Students will understand…* ● What critically workshopping a fiction piece means ● How to give/ask for productive feedback to/from peers ● What is expected from the class as a whole and each individual during class workshops
Transfer Goals ● Incorporating workshops into the writing process ● Listening to feedback and being receptive to critical comments from fellow writers	**Knowledge and Skills** *Students will be able to…* ● Workshop fiction pieces in a classroom setting ● Give feedback to their peers in a critical, considerate way ● Think about what kind of feedback they would like to receive on the piece they submit for workshop

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task(s):
- As a class, "mock" workshop a fiction piece. If possible, it is beneficial to workshop a piece written by the teacher. This gesture promotes vulnerability and willingness to receive feedback.
  - Goal: Establish class guidelines for upcoming workshops
  - Role: Students will play the role of reader and critic during this class with the understanding that criticality does not simply mean negative or to look for mistakes in others' work
  - Audience: The entire class plus the teacher (especially if workshopping one of their pieces)
  - Situation: Students will read the piece that the class will practice workshopping with and write a feedback letter to the author before class. During class time, the class will first begin by establishing regulations and standards for the upcoming workshop week and practice them during the "mock" workshop
  - Performance: Students will be asked to be active participants in the "mock" workshop. They will also submit their written feedback to the teacher
  - Standards: PDE Standards 3, 4, and 5

Other Evidence:
- Comprehension and understanding will be evident during the following workshop sessions when workshopping/discussing student pieces

---

Stage 3: Learning Plan

Learning Activities:
- Where: Students will use their feedback letters and the "mock" workshop as a basis for the following student workshops
- Hook: How do we, as a class, want our workshop space to feel/look/sound like?
- Equip and Experience: Workshopping as part of the writing process.
- Rethink: Understanding that criticality and being critical means more than simply looking for mistakes and areas to improve on. Being critical requires one to understand the perspective of others and acknowledge how one's own biases and identities affect one's interpretation of others' work
- Evaluate: Students will later write reflections on the workshop process. Additionally, the "mock" workshop will demonstrate to the teacher how the students perceive/interact with workshopping
- Tailor: Teachers should acknowledge that workshops are vulnerable spaces and make themselves available to students if they would like to discuss fears/concerns
- Organize: Prep work → mock workshop → debrief

REFERENCES

CENOZ, J., & GORTER, D. (2011). Focus on Multilingualism: A Study of Trilingual Writing. *The Modern Language Journal*, *95*(3), 356–369. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41262372

Delpit, Lisa (1986). Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator. *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (4): 379–386. Doi: https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.56.4.674v5h1m125h3014

Erikson, E. H. (1994). Identity and the life cycle. WW Norton.

Hall, S. (2007). Making Workshops Work. In *Writers Workshop in a Book* (pp. 132–148). Essay, ,Chronicle Books.

Lippi-Green, R., Barrett, R., Cramer, J., & McGowan, K. B. (2023). *English with an accent language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. Routledge.

Mazin, Craig (2019). Scriptnotes, Ep 403: How to Write a Movie Transcript.

Muhammad, G., & Williams, P. (2023). *Unearthing joy: A guide to culturally and historically responsive teaching and learning*. Scholastic Inc.

Flores, N. (2022). Foreword: The Transformative Possibilities of Translanguaging. In *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios: Latinx students and their teachers Rompiendo Fronteras sin miedo* (pp. xix–xxi). forward, Multilingual Matters.

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2008). *Understanding by design*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Way, N., Santos, C., Niwa, E.Y., & Kim-Gervey, C. (2008) To Be or Not to Be: An Exploration of Ethnic Identity Development in Context. *The Intersections of Personal and Social Identities*, 61-79.