

# Who We Are: Past, Present and Future

## *Draft 1*

### **Brief Introduction**

Students like to tell their stories; we see this in the hallways, the lunchrooms, and in the classroom. How can we capitalize on this to engage students in expressing their stories through writing? To foster engagement, students must be able to connect their experiences to the matter being discussed. Therefore, by weaving cultural and local information into the curriculum, students should exhibit higher engagement and retention of the material. Throughout the year, we will be discussing who we are in relation to our past, our present, and our future. Students will have the opportunity to engage with the past by exploring how they ended up in their current city and learning from elder members of their community. They will explore their present by identifying what they currently value and are willing to advocate for. Lastly, looking towards the future, they will have the opportunity to research and present problems and solutions in regards to an issue that directly affects themselves and their local community. At the end of the year, students will again be posed the question: who are we and what will we advocate for?

This lesson plan focuses on the component of “the past,” but it is necessary to understand the long-term plan to understand how everything connects together.

## **Guiding Questions**

- Who are we and what will we advocate for?
- What shapes our identities?
- How has our past shaped our identities?
- How can we connect our past to our present identity?
- What defines us in the present?
- How can we shape our future?

## **Learning Objectives**

- Students will prepare interview questions using stems from writing prompts.
- Students will professionally interact with community members to conduct an oral history.
- Students will write a personal narrative from another person's perspective, including time period and styles.
- Students will connect an artifact to their story.

## Detailed Background

Many students are unaware of their familial and cultural history. In the Rio Grande Valley, one of the initiatives the CHAPS project has undertaken is to highlight the unique histories and backgrounds that enrich this area. My lesson plan is uniquely affected because while my students will be of mostly Hispanic heritage, they are living in Houston, Texas. However, learning about their history is still a meaningful task for them. This is an opportunity for my students to engage with the curriculum in a highly personal way. In the process of learning writing and reading skills, they will be working with information that directly pertains to them. Anyone who has worked with adolescents knows that they enjoy thinking about themselves.

The ability to write a personal narrative is a critical skill for 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Texas. This skill is directly tested on the state assessment, and it allows students to develop organization and creative writing habits that will be useful through college. A long-term goal of this lesson project is to have students edit their personal narratives and to prepare them for presentation in a local library or museum. In order to prepare students for this activity, we will look at excerpts of biographies or narratives of people from the Valley. This will allow students to get a sense of what their final project will entail. We will discuss the story told through the narrative and in what ways my students can relate. Once we have a clear picture of the end product, we will focus on the interview. I will share an excerpt from the transcription of my interview with someone from the Rio Grande Valley. This will give students an idea of what culturally-relevant information they could listen for, as many students might not recognize certain markers as unique to their family history. For example, my interviewee clearly linked her work as a child to a duty to help her family. She repeated several times that what she did was for the family, and that she never regretted it. She linked this mindset to today, again stating that her family has always been and continues to be close. By having students trace back their family history, they will delve

into this idea of how their past has shaped their identities. The next step will be to have students practice recording an interview and formulating culturally relevant interview questions.

Through these discussions and additional short readings, students will be able make cultural connections to their heritage. Ideally, this will heighten their interest in presenting the material, thus contributing an incentive to further developing their written skills. During the two-week window when students are conducting interviews, class time will be focused on laying the foundational skills of essay writing. Grammar review will begin with subjects and verbs and progress to compound sentences. Essay features at this point will focus on following Freytag's pyramid and using sensory details.

After writing up a summary of the interview, students will have the opportunity to present two highlights. As a class, we will analyze the personal narrative I wrote based off my interview, and we will determine how I narrowed down the topic. Students will review their interviews to brainstorm potential personal narrative topics, and then they will create their own personal narrative.

As a culmination, students will present their favorite excerpt from their essay. In addition, utilizing the assessment questions, they will explain how their understanding of who they are and what they value has deepened.

## Preparation Instructions

- Gather eight one-page auto-biographies from authors.
- Graphic organizer for author biographies
- Prepare an example biography with your family tree.
- Find instructions for conducting a hand-written oral history.

## Lesson Activities

### *INM*

1. As a Do Now, or first assignment, give the pre-assessment.
2. Present biography narratives to students through 8 stations.
  - a. Questions include: What story did this person tell? How could you relate to their story?  
Is there anything else you would like to know about their story?
3. Discuss the biographies and map out the skills required for the end product.

### *Before the Interview*

1. Share with students an interview excerpt (oral and transcribed).
2. Conduct a mock 5-minute interview with a student. Model which information you would write down and which information you would not.
3. Have students conduct 5-minute interviews with each other to practice writing information.
4. Brainstorm with your class a list of questions for students to ask. Be sure to guide students to questions that will elicit stories from their interviewee. (Use a list of personal narrative prompts)
5. Assign students a 1-2 week window to conduct their oral histories and to type what they learned.

### *During the Interview Window*

1. This is the time to overview personal narrative skills such as sensory details, hooks, dialogue, etc. as well as to review paragraph structure and simple sentences.
2. Connect all lessons back to the personal narrative rubric.

### *After the Interview*

1. Have students share 2 highlights from their interview with their groups.
2. Share with students a sample personal narrative based off the sample interview. Grade it based on the personal narrative rubric.
3. Go back to the transcript and discuss where I got the information for the personal narrative.
4. Have students begin brainstorming potential stories they could pull from their interview.
5. Have students create a personal narrative based on their interview.
6. Peer-review the personal narrative.
7. Have students complete the post-assessment questions.
8. Have students present an excerpt from their personal narrative to their group (or whole class) and explain what they learned about the connection between their family history and their identity.

## Assessment

*Answer the following questions in complete sentences:*

1. What do you know about your family's history? How did you end up in Houston, Texas?
2. How has your family history shaped who you are?
3. What are two things you would like to know about your family history?
4. After the interview: did you learn anything that connects to your heart chart?

## Skills that will be targeted

- Brainstorming personal ideas for writing.
- Identifying a concise moment for a story.
- Write from a different point-of-view.
- Writing in complete sentences.
- Using sensory details to bring a story to life.
- Recording main ideas from a text or oral presentation.

## Resources

- [Link to the biographies used in INM](#)
- [Link to the interview transcript and example essay](#)
- [Link to other oral histories projects](#)
- [Link to personal narrative rubric](#)