

Our Heroes, Ourselves

Gwen Miraglia
Chavez High School

In classical times, heroes were god-men. In the Middle Ages, they were god's men. In the Renaissance, they were universal men. In the nineteenth century, they were self-made men. Now we must look to the common man, for it is with the common man that the future of heroism and national spirit lies.

-Diane Matesic

INTRODUCTION

Heroes and heroines, often born of gods and possessing a supernatural power or two, can languish in the most ordinary places. This is precisely why they are so important to my students, who lack the privileges enjoyed by many peers in other schools. Ordinary family and community heroes are a fundamental part of their lives.

A demographic look at our school, Cesar Chavez Senior High, in Houston ISD's Southeast District, produces a profile of predominantly (57%) Hispanic teens, 3% Asian, 9% Anglo and 31% African-American, who live in a working class neighborhood located near the Port of Houston, just outside of the Houston area's massive petrochemical industrial complex. Our enrollment is currently 2200, and the school, only 3 years old, is a state-of-the-art facility. We house a budding Environmental Science Magnet school of 135 students, now in its second year.

Our plant is an Annenberg *School for a New Society*: we house specialty academies to suit a variety of career paths for the other students within: Fine Arts Academy for theater students, artists, and filmmakers; Business and Criminal Justice Academy for law enforcement officials and corporate job seekers; Pre-Engineering and Advanced Technology Academy for those interested in a career specializing in engineering, architecture, or computer tech; Health Science and Human Services for young people who plan a career in health care. We provide this array of choices to prepare students for their college years and beyond, according to their current interests. It is part of Chavez' effort to move toward learner-centered education.

Suppose a Chavez student wants to make a career of filmmaking. He will study a core curriculum within his academy, Fine Arts, under teachers who work together and across the curriculum creating strategies which support his career interests. English teachers emphasize use of dialog and scriptwriting techniques and analysis. Science teachers challenge him with activities that involve the physical science of stage and screen, along with opportunities to make presentations. Social studies teachers encourage

students to research the histories of great directors and film production over the ages. Math teachers present opportunities for film students to analyze statistics related to the business of filmmaking. This example of a learner-centered, career-oriented environment is carried on throughout all of our academies.

Our Newcomer's Academy for English Speakers of Other Languages will house around 150 students next fall. We have between 300-400 students enrolled in the English Speakers of Other Languages program, counting the beginning to the upper transitional levels. Most come to Cesar Chavez from Mexico or Central American countries, and some come from South America. A small percentage are from Asian countries. Almost one fourth of the school is Limited English Proficient (LEP), or LEP-monitored. Those students have reached a level of English proficiency to be transitioned into the academy that suits their career of choice. Meanwhile, we are carefully monitoring their skills as teachers turn toward professional development to learn new strategies to enhance listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Meanwhile, countless upperclassmen must take full or part-time jobs to help support their families. Daily, we learn of students living with single parents, grandparents or relatives. A surprising number of children talk about their children. The majority of our students are eligible for the free lunch program.

As a speech and language arts teacher, a focal point in my role is to bring relevance to the classroom. For this reason, I make an effort to engage my students in their own learning, connecting their cultural background with knowledge and skills required for graduation and the post-graduation experience known as Life. From the teaching of Formal vs. Informal English to helping the gifted select contest material, my goal is to select learner-centered activities to help student build essential knowledge and skills. As Frank Longcrier, our Teacher of the Year and EOSL advocate puts it, "We must meet them where they are."

I teach Communication Applications, a one-semester speech course required for graduation in Texas. Its purpose is to prepare young people to communicate effectively in the workplace. This skill is an objective of the Cesar Chavez Senior High School Graduate Profile. "Effective Communicator" tops the list of profile characteristics. Not surprising: effective communicators are the first hired and first promoted in today's business world.

So, with a *required* speech course, speech educators are faced with 21st century issues at Cesar Chavez Senior High and throughout Texas. Add a high percentage of limited English proficiency, combine it with "Effective Communicator" topping the profile of skills required for exiting the high school environment, and we have created a challenging, yet exciting, equation. No longer is speech class limited to the gregarious and loquacious budding Toastmaster or contest child. We are preparing each child for effectiveness in interpersonal communication, group process, and in making

presentations. The speakers of other languages; the “quiet children”; the Advanced Placement candidates; the mathematicians and the computer professionals; the nurse and the doctor; the scientist; the policeman, the attorney and the politician; the artist, writer and director – all must be prepared as effective communicators.

In a country this pluralistic and diverse, we need common threads. Those we have, such as sports, music, television, and the Internet, bind us together as a nation, create a national spirit, and frequently test our value system. But these are not common threads that provide the continuity our young people so desperately seek today. The one that provides continuity for children is the Hero.

Last semester, I polled students in my Communication Applications classes. These students are in the 14-18 year age range. In the poll, I asked students to list their heroes, and was not surprised to learn that many of *their* heroes toil at unskilled labor jobs. In fact, a significant number are pioneering a new life in a place where limited language skills may pose a daily struggle. Numerous children’s lives are challenged by legal and immigration issues. Some heroes are in prison. Some are in the armed forces. Other family heroes are seldom seen because they live in faraway lands. Some have died for a cause. Some may have long passed, distant memories of grandchildren and great-grand children. Most young people at Chavez can look back on their family tree for stories of struggle and sacrifice and character that meet the definition of the hero.

My great-grandfather was a Neapolitan Italian immigrant who came to the United States through Ellis Island just before the turn of the 20th century. He was carrying a violin, some pocket change, and had a pregnant wife by his side. He taught violin lessons and played at weddings in order to put his six U.S. born daughters through school. My students have similar stories about their ancestry, some joyful, some sorrowful.

One particular student’s paternal grandparents owned a ranch in Mexico. The ranch adjacent to their property bore vast fields of marijuana, so close that it began to seed itself and grow into his family’s property. The grandparent’s request for the neighbor to discontinue their crop resulted in murder, execution style, of both grandparents. Because an effort for justice involving the authorities was in vain, the family abandoned their property. The family stayed together and migrated to Texas to create a new life.

Other families have been torn apart. A sixteen-year-old girl stood in front of her Communication Applications classmates and read aloud a Valentine letter from her father, which she received when she was eight years old. It was the second and last time he had ever communicated with her. He lives in another state. As she wiped tears away, she concluded her presentation by remarking that she loves her father and always will, but the real hero in her life is her mother, who is single, and sole support of her family of four children.

Appreciation of parents is an admirable quality I have observed in the young people I teach. An Environmental Science Magnet School student recently related a few anecdotes to his class of his mishaps and trials as a pre-teen in Mexico, where he used to fight with his peers and make bad grades. He concluded that his parents were heroes for bringing him to the United States for schooling. They left grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins behind. Financially inconvenient and distant from his family as Houston is, he is the quintessential math and science student. Now socially skillful, he carries himself with confidence. This year, at sixteen years of age, he entered the National Honor Society at Cesar Chavez High School.

And still they rise. In the heroic tradition, my students' heroes come from modest beginnings. What their heroes have in common is they share a name and a heritage with my students: these are their family heroes, doers of mighty deeds that my students will someday share with their own children and grandchildren. These heroes performed deeds that gave them life, that evoke courage and the faith to pursue their dreams.

What's wrong with Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, or the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? Aren't they our heroes? Of course they are, and they can be a part of this unit. Yet, they are not living among my students, and my students need a visceral connection to understand themselves as potential heroes. Also, stories of heroes spring from a cultural context; this is a concept I want to emphasize to my students. Once they view the lives of the familiar, see the pattern, recognize the character traits, they will be ready to lay these patterns and traits over the lives of our heroes of Western Civilization. They will recognize the patterns and traits in literary heroes from culture to culture. Ultimately, they will synthesize these patterns and character traits and add them to their repertoire of life skills.

Simply put, family is fundamental to my students, which is why this should be the source of heroes for them to emulate. Media images, sports figures, superheroes, American history icons, conquistadors, and the protagonists of Western World literature are not as immediate to them. I must begin at their foundation, with family heroes, in order for them to embrace "book" heroes. I must start with the heroes with their names in order to give them a definition of the hero. I must work inductively, starting with their heritage and ancestry, to enrich their understanding of heroic character traits and flaws.

Hero education is character education. First, we can view an individual's entire life, see it as a whole, and examine its structure – its high roads and its low roads. Next we look at our and others' definitions of heroes: Campbell, Gibbon. Then we examine the character traits that create a hero profile, or composite. That done, we lay these character traits over our family heroes and give them their due. Next, we seek and research an historic or literary figure whose life fits the structure and profile we have established, and compare that hero with our family hero. Finally, we share our heroes with others, thereby reinforcing the structure and character traits as we listen and compare. But our ultimate goal is to synthesize the models and create our own lives from their examples.

Two years ago, in an end-of-the-year questionnaire, I asked my students to create a list of topics they would have liked to present to the class. An overwhelming majority made it clear they wanted to talk about their family, a family member, or the native country of their family. The time has come for me to create a unit that will open the doors for my students to learn how to research. Ancestry is just the beginning. I want them to discuss their family heroes, comparing their traits and qualities in the context of heroes and heroines of history or literature.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Do most families have a member with the qualities and traits of a hero? Is there a noble individual, one whose quest may have been challenged by temptations and dangers to which he or she did not succumb? Can we identify a man or a woman who stood for something, had a mission, set out on a challenging journey? Is there one who has forged a path for their progeny? Do these family heroes bear the classic qualities of the hero: such as sacrifice, determination, loyalty, courage, dedication, intrepidity, valor, selflessness, conviction, gallantry, perseverance, fortitude or bravery? If so, each belongs in the gallery. They deserve comparison with Cesar Chavez, Frederick Douglass, Hank Aaron, Sacajawea, Huckleberry Finn, Joan of Arc, Antigone, Juan Diego, Christopher Columbus, “Corky” Gonzalez, Sir Isaac Newton, and other historic or literary heroes.

OVERVIEW

In the aforementioned poll of my 9-12 grade level students, I asked specifically about their personal heroes: who were their heroes from sports? entertainment? history? fiction? from their everyday lives? The heroes they rated highest were their family heroes. All heroes are evocative – their lives are a work of art, especially in context. Heroes of the family are even more tangible than “book” or archetypal heroes because of the living context. Therefore, they have much more relevance and credibility. These are people with whom they most identify and hold sacred; the ones they care about, who inspire them to achievement because of their deeds and courage, and other astounding character traits: Uncle Oscar, cousin Rogelio, Mom, Dad, Tia Victoria, or Uncle Angel. These are flesh and blood, not characters, but they do exemplify character traits.

Aunts, uncles, older brothers, grandparents alike have taken the firewalk of the hero, as Campbell defines it:

. . . a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 30)

By using this definition of the classic hero and by teaching the qualities of the hero(ine), this unit will support character education initiatives (HoustonISD) as much or more than teaching any novel or play.

After they have defined heroic qualities, I expect my students to first be able to think inductively about the qualities that make their family heroes true to Campbell's definition. I expect them to understand why we need heroes. As Gibbon puts it, "[we need heroes] to combat the ambiguities and temptations of adult life." He goes on, "...to find the good to be imitated and the evil to be avoided" (Gibbon 11). Analyzing exemplary heroes, and the characteristics that make them heroes, gives young people the understanding of the universality of character traits, race or religion notwithstanding. Analyzing an individual's life cycle and the process of becoming a hero gives young people a more panoramic view of their own lives. They see others' obstacles, flaws, and setbacks. They see how they can be dealt with through strength of character. Such a perspective can give them faith in the outcome of their own lives.

My students have grown up in a fast and cool world replete with sound bites, overnight sensations, easy money, and quick fixes. As a result, their current worldview may be only a narrow slice of reality. Especially to the youngest and least mature, time is all about living in the moment. Many freshmen cannot see beyond the horizon of graduation. Meanwhile, fear of failure runs rampant through the crowd. My freshman view the four years to graduation as an immense expanse of time, a vague sea of eventuality. Consider this: to a 15 year old, 4 years is more than one-fourth of his life! The reality is that the path to graduation is incremental. Like Columbus, Odysseus was a hero because he went through the process of *becoming* a hero. He sailed beyond the horizon, perhaps the supreme challenge for a man of his era. He met each monster, one by one, head on, dauntlessly. Life is a process of being, becoming, and meeting the occasion. So it goes when becoming a hero.

I expect them to research and write about a universal hero(ine) from history or literature. Using the character traits, and including the Campbell definition, they should become aware of connections between their family heroes and the heroes of history and literature throughout world civilization. Furthermore, understanding of diversity will be enlarged as Chavez High School children from Texas, Mexico, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, El Salvador, Columbia, etc. share personal stories of family achievement.

Making connections is a hallmark of critical thinking. As in responding to or evaluating a piece of literature, my students connect family members' qualities with qualities of historical and/or literary heroic figures. Hence, those living heroes become part of a larger network outside the family network. As my class makes presentations on family heroes and their qualities, and as the students make comparisons between the qualities of family heroes and universal heroes, they create a larger network for the class to discuss. In the process of evaluating their own research and presentation, they will see

that they are embedded with the hero potential and the seeds of their personal possibility can be awakened and brought to fruition.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Academic knowledge gleaned by students from this unit will include a working vocabulary of character traits, Internet research and traditional library skills, and discovering facts about lives in a historical context. I expect students to acquire specific academic skills in the unit. As a language arts teacher, I have combined Project Clear goals with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills for both the English core curriculum and the Communication Applications course. My unit will strengthen skills mandated by Project Clear and TEKS: Reading, researching and analyzing non-fiction (including Internet sources), drawing conclusions, making comparisons, collaborative planning, writing and preparing manuscripts for presentations, creating and using visual representations to support narratives, proofreading, creating outlines, implementing visual effects to enhance presentations, using narrative, chronological, cause and effect, or comparison/contrast techniques, using effective verbal or nonverbal strategies in presentations, self and peer-editing and evaluation techniques. Because I have combined English and Speech TEKS, this unit can be used either in speech or English classes at any high school level.

In the next four sections, I will share an abbreviated outline for the language arts teacher who may want to use this unit, entirely or in part. Afterward, I have included three sample lesson plans: 1) Writing Workshop, 2) Baseball Card Posters, and 3) The Baseball Game. If I were offering this unit to an English class, rather than a speech class, I might begin with either or both the novels, *Bless me Ultima* by Rodolfo Anaya, or *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Both are remarkably accessible to high school students, and both contain strong family heroes.

Scope and Sequence

I. Risk vs. The Noble Self

A. Say Your Name

First, before any other type of presentation, my students are required to stand before their audience of peers and announce their full name twice at the speaker's stand. I model this activity, using the appropriate vocal projection, posture, eye contact, and a dignified presence. We say our name to practice and adjust to new delivery skills. More importantly, using our full name as content gives inexperienced presenters a chance to send a message of utmost importance without having to rely on notes. The stakes are high, but the risk is low. Our name contains the seed of the Noble Self. It is the first opportunity for young speakers to announce their identity to the class, and to present

themselves with dignity. It gives them a standing in the class. The exercise prepares them for future, more complex presentations.

B. Life Map

Next, my students will create a Life Map modeled in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens Workbook* (Covey). The model prompts them to consider milestones in their lives. It gives them a picture of their past as a process. Some of the prompts are about people who have influenced them, and those may be connected with the upcoming study of character traits and family heroes. Much later in the semester, Life Maps will be presented to 2nd grade classes at Patterson Elementary School. Patterson is a literature magnet elementary, which feeds into our high school. Deborah Hall, another Hero Seminar participant and colleague, teaches 2nd grade at Patterson. We agreed to collaborate because 1) teenagers are like gods and goddesses to second graders and 2) this will be an outstanding opportunity for role modeling and for my students to practice their delivery skills before a live audience.

C. "My Proudest Moment"

In a one-page narrative, students will write a story entitled "My Proudest Moment." Using the Writing Workshop technique (Atwell 1987), partners will edit each other's work, then practice, in standing rehearsal, eye contact, volume, posture, vocal projection, and a dignified presence. As students present their Proudest Moment to the class, the audience will use peer evaluation forms to respond with positive feedback on their *effort* at delivery skills and content. Each student should receive positive feedback at this time because each student has presented, in a dignified manner, an aspect of his Noble Self. After students present, each will self-evaluate, reflecting on what was difficult, what was easy, and what aspects of content and delivery they will work on next time.

D. Defining the Hero

The students are now ready to create a definition of a hero. I use a Peter H. Gibbon's model, displayed on a sentence strip: "They enlarge our imagination, teach us to think big, and expand our sense of the possible (Gibbon 11)." Students will write their definitions, first on notebook paper; then, using the Writing Workshop technique, peer edit for spelling, punctuation, capitalization and grammar. After the peer edit, I will check each and give the students sentence strips to write their definitions and decorate as they choose. Later we will display them.

II. Family Heroes

A. My Family Hero

I will ask my students to think of a family member, present or past, who qualifies as a hero, by their definition. Some will know immediately who their family hero is. Some will interview parents or grandparents to discover a family member. A few will find a member of their extended family. Each student will write a one-page narrative telling who their hero is and how that individual acquired the hero status in the family. Students will use Writing Workshop and standing rehearsal as they did on their Proudest Moment project, peer editing and peer coaching for writing mechanics and delivery skills. Before he begins his presentation, a student will announce which delivery skill he is working on in this presentation. Other than that, students will present “My Family Hero” as they did “My Proudest Moment,” with a similar peer feedback rubric, positive feedback, and a self-evaluation.

B. A Hero’s Character

Following the presentations, I will give a mini-Character Development lesson on Character Traits associated with heroes: perseverance, sacrifice/risk, loyalty, commitment, determination, altruism, quest (the spirit of discovery), fortitude/spirit, and bravery/ valor/courage. For each trait, I will use examples of family heroes mentioned in the narrative presentations. Students will share in groups, helping each other label their family heroes with the one quality that best describes the hero.

C. Baseball Card Posters

I will present 5 models of Baseball Card Hero Posters: Sacajawea, “Corky” Gonzalez, Frederick Douglass, Hank Aaron, Amelia Earhardt, and John Glenn. As a class, we will examine what makes each of these people a hero. I will help them define “historical context.” Using student definitions of a hero from the Hero Definition Strips, we will determine what makes each a hero in his or her historical context. We will assign character traits to each hero. Students will be provided with Venn Diagrams and be assigned to work in small groups with one of the 5 Baseball Card Hero Posters. In small groups, they will work to draw comparisons of the 5 hero models with their family heroes. Ultimately, they must select one character trait to assign to each hero. To amplify what the students have done, I will introduce Joseph Campbell’s definition of the hero as a model, pointing out its similarities to student definitions. Students may choose to modify their definitions at this time.

D. Hall of Fame

We will create a “Hall of Fame” in the classroom. Students will create Baseball Card Posters of family heroes to post in the Hall. The posters have 2 sides: side one is labeled

with the name of the hero and his/her character trait. It also includes Vital Statistics and an illustration or photograph of the family hero. Side two bears the name of the hero, the “My Family Hero” narrative and the student’s name.

III. Universal Heroes

A. Hero Trivia Quiz

I will post 20 names of universal heroes on sentence strips around the walls (Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Barbara Walters, Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Ira Hayes, Susan B. Anthony, Cesar Chavez, Lewis and Clark, Louis Armstrong, Charles Lindhberg, Muhammed Ali, Christopher Columbus, Frederick Douglass, George Patton, Barbara Jordan, Sidney Poitier, Ghandi, and Amelia Earhardt). We will have a trivia quiz to determine the claim to fame of each hero. Then I will ask my students to brainstorm a list of their heroes from history and literature (stories of saints, Bible stories, familiar fiction, such as Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Odysseus from *The Odyssey*), whom they may want to research.

B. Fact-Finding Mission

The class will make a trip to the school library, where they may use on-line resources, books, periodicals and any other reference materials to research universal heroes with attributes that concur with their family heroes. Using these resources, students will print out or check out 3 resources for outside reading and study. From these resources, they will select a universal hero who meets their qualifications of character traits and achievements.

C. Timeline

To prepare for writing, I will ask the students to make a timeline of their hero’s life. Hallmarks in this timeline will include the Vital Statistics (name, date and place of birth, occupation, most notable achievement, and year of death, if applicable) and will also include a total of 3 or more of the most notable achievements, including dates; education; 2 obstacles to career/achievement, including dates; year of death (if applicable); today’s date.

D. Universal Hero Synopsis

On writing day, a student can use his timeline to prepare a one-page synopsis of his hero’s life. Students will use Writing Workshop to peer and self-edit their writing. Sharing with peers will be helpful for the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization. In the second draft, we will add the character trait, and the student will justify his label with reasons why he chose it for his hero. After a second draft, we will post the synopsis on the back of the Baseball Card Poster. The students will

assemble their Baseball Card Posters in a way similar to the assembly of their Family Hero Posters. Example:

SYNOPSIS OF HANK AARON'S LIFE

HENRY "HANK" AARON FEBRUARY 5, 1934 - BASEBALL PLAYER ALL-TIME MAJOR LEAGUE HOME RUN KING

Henry "Hank" Aaron, all-time major league home run king, was born in Mobile, Alabama in 1934. At eighteen, he joined the Negro League. Noting his outstanding ability, the Milwaukee Braves System signed him to join their minor system that same year. Few African American players had been integrated into white baseball at that time. This move was a full decade before the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and Hank made career advances yet unknown to many of his race.

Meanwhile, he met obstacles that would challenge any man's spirit and fortitude, no matter what color his skin. Those were the obstacles of racism. Hank persevered, even though they moved him to play on a southern team in Jacksonville Florida, where Jim Crow laws were still enforced. Fans, and even some teammates, rejected him. Jackie Robinson, major league baseball's first African-American, was a great inspiration for Aaron.

In the following year, 1953, Hank showed them what he was made of with his batting average, runs scored, total bases and runs batted in. The South Atlantic Minor League declared him Most Valuable Player. Still, there were some hotels and restaurants in the South that would not serve him because of his color. The controversy over race continued. African-American people in baseball were still not allowed to drink from the same fountains as their white brothers. Hank's obstacles continued as his fame and opportunities increased. All this seemed to make him play even harder.

In 1954, Hank was called up to join the big leagues as a Milwaukee Brave. Three years later, his power and speed as an outfielder and his threat as a base-stealer helped bring his team to the 1957 World Series where they defeated the New York Yankees.

Aaron remained with the Braves through a move to Atlanta, and was the first American baseball player to reach 3,000 hits with 500 home runs. That was in 1970, when he was 36 years old. Four years later, Hank "The Hammer" Aaron became the Major League Home Run King, setting the all-time record for career home runs.

In 1974, Aaron was traded to the Milwaukee Brewers in order to return to his original major league city. In 1976, he finished his playing career with 755 home runs, and 2,297

runs batted in. Aaron, a member of baseball's Hall of Fame, will always be considered one of baseball's all-time greats.

After retiring as a player, the Atlanta Braves hired Aaron as Director of Player Development. The Braves have developed some of baseball's top players over the last twenty seasons. He wrote his autobiography *I Had a Hammer* and remains a baseball executive to this very day.

E. Creating a Rubric For Presentation

Continuing with the theme of baseball, I will ask the students to create a diamond-shaped rubric to self-and peer evaluate their upcoming presentations. The rubric will be based on effort at content and delivery skills.

F. Game Day

On presentation day, I will draw 2 large baseball diamonds on the board. I will divide the class into two teams. Within the teams, pairs (which I will have predetermined) will present together in a single presentation. These pairs will be "batters" for their teams. At the beginning of the game, I will announce pairings, and student pairs will exchange their 2 cards: the one for the family hero and the one for the universal hero. Each player will study his partners' cards for 10 minutes, familiarizing himself with the heroes. Players will be preparing to "bat" or present the partners' heroes as they stand together before the audience. Meanwhile, I will randomly select a batting order. I will invite a colleague to be the umpire, who will determine the quality of "hits", posting each teams' hits on the baseball diamond. A "hit" will be based on the quality of the partner presentation, according to the rubric students have created. A "Strong" presentation will be a home run, an "Effective" presentation will be a triple, etc. In the end, the team with the most runs will win a 10-point bonus on their rubrics.

IV. Synthesis/Self Evaluation: Our Heroes, Ourselves

Self-evaluation for the Baseball Game will include prompts for students to respond about their strengths and challenges in the area of delivery skills. For further insight, I will ask students to video interview one another about the character traits they share with their heroes. This video will be presented in a video display in the school library, along with a jury-selected top twenty Baseball Card Posters. Teen heroes are ready to present their Life Maps to Patterson Elementary School second grade classes.

CONCLUSION

As educators, we are deeply involved in the process of creating a national spirit. We lead; they create. We plant; they harvest. My hope would be this: as they identify their family and universal heroes, as they learn more about traits of character that create the

scaffolding of the spirit, each student will find a foothold in his journey up the scaffold. On the way, he/she will discover that a hero indeed has a thousand faces, and one of those faces can be seen in the mirror.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: “My Family Hero”

Objectives

The student will prepare scripts or notes for presentation. The student evaluates his/her own writing or the writing of others.

Materials Needed

Pen

Notebook paper

Visual aid(s)

Writing Workshop Norms (a handout)

Transparencies

Peer feedback rubric

Teacher evaluation rubric

Procedure

The lesson begins with a teacher model and visual aids: an old sepia tone 8x10 framed photograph and a rosary. In a one-page narrative, I tell a story of my family hero, Nana, my grandmother. The photo shows her in her wedding gown, next to her husband on their wedding day. I drape the rosary over the picture, and tell how she inspired my religious choice, Catholicism. I take the manuscript with me, but I do not use it until later, when showing it to the class on a transparency projector. I model the techniques of opening remarks, body, and closing remarks along with these delivery skills: eye contact, posture, vocal projection, and presence. I ask the students for questions, a model for the forthcoming Writing Workshop.

I preview the Writing Workshop Norms, which include norms for giving and receiving criticism. To model a narrative structure, I show the written narrative on a transparency, pointing out the opening, body, and closing remarks. I ask for questions and comments to find out what needs to be revised.

As students write their narratives, I make my revisions. When their narratives are complete, I show them my revisions. It is time for them to pair up with a partner to read their narratives as partners listen. Partners ask a question and make a comment, according to the Writing Workshop Norms. Reading the narrative aloud, a student will hear his voice, organization, word choice, etc., and usually note some revisions. When partners ask questions, the questions help the writer to note any ambiguities in his text.

Revising to clarify ambiguities creates clearer communication. It is time to rewrite, using the new information gleaned from Writing Workshop tools.

After the rewrite, I ask my students to do a standing rehearsal, with one partner, practicing until they have effective posture, vocal projection, and eye contact of 80% or better. After they reach a confidence level with the text, they may rehearse with a small group of four other students. Just before the small group rehearsal, I show them the rubrics we will be using for peer feedback and teacher evaluation.

On presentation day, we create a marquee, where students choose their order by writing their names on the board. We select an emcee, whom is coached to graciously host the presentation by preparing the audience and making the speakers comfortable. Emcee is a demanding but popular job, because it is extra credit. Part of the emcee's job is to distribute four peer feedback rubrics to all speakers. Speakers then distribute the peer feedback rubrics to people whom they can trust to make positive and encouraging remarks. No speaker should go home thinking he/she did not make a good effort. Another part of the emcee's job is to take up the manuscripts, attaching the peer rubrics when the respondents have completed them. Also, the emcee models applause for the audience, and thanks each speaker for his/her presentation. The teacher's job is to complete the teacher evaluation rubric and to watch how quickly the students learn to run the program themselves.

Lesson Plan 2: Creation of a Family Hall of Fame

Objectives

Students will assemble Family Hero Posters for display.

Materials Needed

11"x17" colored construction paper
Photographs or illustrations of family heroes
Typed version of "My Family Hero"
Glue, markers, scissors
Model of a hero poster

Procedure

The students have written and presented their family hero narrative and have typed it an 8-1/2x 11 sheet, and they have also determined their heroes' character traits.

I will show my students a model of my family hero poster of Nana. On side one, her photograph, Vital Statistics (name, date and place of birth, occupation, and greatest accomplishment) and heroic character trait. On side two, I have pasted the "My Family Hero" narrative, and my name.

Working in small groups of four, each student will choose two colors of construction paper. Each group will be given a package of markers and scissors. Each group will cut, paste and label their posters according to the model, monitoring and assisting in each other's progress.

After assembling, our next step is to punch two holes in the top of each poster, attaching strings to suspend the posters from the ceiling. We will attach the posters to the ceiling in our corridor, establishing a Hall of Fame. Posters will be evaluated on content, precision, and application of character traits.

Lesson Plan 3: Baseball Game

Objectives

The students will use information effectively to support and clarify points during presentations. The students will use effective verbal and nonverbal strategies during presentations.

Materials Needed

Family Hero Posters
"Universal" Hero Posters
Baseball Diamond Rubric
Baseball Diamond Scoreboard

Procedure

On Game Day, I will draw 2 large baseball diamonds on the board. I will divide the class into two teams. The teams will choose a name or simply call themselves the Blue Team and the Silver Team to correspond with school colors.

Based on the skill levels, relationships, and preparedness I have observed leading up to this presentation, I will pre-determine pairs to play within each team. The pairs will be "batters" for their teams. A pair will go before the audience together.

Before the game begins, I will announce pairings. Here I will ask student pairs to exchange the 2 cards: the family hero card and the universal hero card. For 10 minutes, each player will study his partners' cards. The reason for a 10-minute "warm-up" is so that each player on the team can familiarize himself with the information on each card. As they study the cards, each player is preparing to "bat"; that is, to share the partners' hero information with the audience.

As they study the cards, I will randomly select a batting order. I will invite a colleague to objectively observe and evaluate as the umpire. The umpire's purpose will be to determine the quality of each presentation. The quality of presentations will be based on content (a thorough, organized presentation of information) and delivery (volume, eye contact, posture, and dignified presence). Based on these evaluations, the

umpire will determine the kind of “hit” each batter makes. For example, a “Strong” presentation will be a home run; an “Effective” presentation will be a triple, etc. The least effective presentation will be a single. After each presentation, the guest umpire will post “hits” on the baseball diamond scoreboard.

Once the first team completes its batting sequence, the other team will get its chance to bat. The second team will receive its cards to study during a 10 minute “seventh inning stretch,” after which play will resume. The team with the most runs wins. A bonus of 10 points will be awarded to each student on the winning team. Basic baseball rules will apply, with the exception of a limit of 3 outs. This allows every student to have a chance at bat, which is essential to the lesson plan. Red-hots and Crackerjacks are optional.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987.
Delineates Writing Workshop techniques and supports their effectiveness.
- Breslin, Jimmy. *The Short, Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.
The path of a number of illegal immigrant workers who follow the American Dream.
- Buck, Pearl S. *The Story Bible*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1971.
Bible tales told in seamless prose.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton UP, 1949.
The definitive study of the hero archetype.
- Center, Candy and Jean-Paul Nadeau. *Public Speaking Through Storytelling: Voices of Diversity*. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1995.
Exercises to help students create oral histories.
- Covey, Sean. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens Workbook*. Franklin Covey Co., 1999.
Resource for Life Map and other insight-generating activities.
- Gibbon, Peter H. “Heroes of Our Age: How Heroes Can Elevate Students’ Lives” *American Educator*, Winter 2002: 8-48.
Responds to contemporary questions that teachers may have about defining our heroes.

Heffernan, Eileen and Jerry Rizzo. *Fifty-Seven Saints*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994.
Stories of Catholic saints for children/young adults.

Houston Independent School District. *Project CLEAR Curriculum*. English, Tenth Grade. Houston, Texas: Houston Independent School District, 2001.
Detailed guide for teachers containing objectives, curriculum, and strategies.

Lewis, Jon E., Ed. *The Mammoth Book of Heroes: True Tales of Courage from Ancient Times to September 11, 2001*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2002.
Chronological histories written in an engaging, child-friendly manner.

McCutcheon, Randolph et al. *Communication Applications*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 2001.
Textbook adopted by Houston Independent School District for the study of communication applications.

Rodriguez, Jeannette. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican-American Women*. University of Texas Press, 1994.
Relates the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, including the Nahuatl interpretation of the apparition and its impact (31-46).

Rosenbluth, Vera. *Keeping Family Stories Alive*. Point Roberts, WA: Hartley & Marks Publishers, Inc., 1997.
How to research, tell, and preserve family stories.

Web Sources for Teachers

HISD Connect. Houston Independent School District. June 2003.
<<http://www.houstonisd.org/>>
Contains Character Education links.

Hispanic American Hall of Fame. Unbeatables, Inc. May 2003.
<<http://www.unbeatables.com/HHeroes.html>>.
Hispanic American Hall of Fame “baseball card” examples of Hispanic American scientists, poets, educators, athletes, writers, artists, business people, etc.

Quimby, Don. *Finding the Hero Within*. 2002. The Teachers.Net Gazette. June 2003.
<<http://teachers.net/gazette/NOV02/quimby.html>>
An article written by a teacher about teachers helping students find their positive qualities and traits.

What Makes a Hero? National Endowment for the Humanities. June 2003.
<http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?ID=251>.

Lesson plan to teach students how to identify and list deeds of a hero.

Web Sources for Students

American National Biography. June 2003. <<http://www.anb.org/>>

Includes cross-references of associated lives. A subscription site voted one of the “Best References of the Year” by *Library Journal*.

Biography.com. 13 May 2003. <<http://www.biography.com/>>

Scores of life stories to browse for choices and help with timelines/life synopses.

Bois, Danuta. *Women's Biographies: Distinguished Women of Past and Present*. 23 June 2003. <<http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/>>
Lives of distinguished women, past and present.

Lives: The Biography Resource. 5 Apr. 2003. <<http://www.amillionlives.com/>>
This site provides links to hundreds of special interest biography sites and thousands of biographies.

Students of Dr. Preisser's Developmental Psychology Course. *Qualities of a Hero*. 2001. Mesa Community College. June 2003.
<<http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/dept/d46/psy/dev/Fall01/hero/qualities.html>>.
Defines 14 qualities of a hero.

The *My Hero* Project. *My Hero*. University of Southern California. 1 May 2003.
<<http://www.myhero.com/home.asp>>
Categorizes heroes into types; features stories and allows students to post their heroes and stories about them.