

**My Future on the Line:  
Discovering Self through the Past for a Better Tomorrow**  
*(Lessons for students of color in creating autobiographies and biographies through various mediums)*

*Deborah L. Andrépoint*  
Sharpstown Middle School

*The words “I am...” Are potent words; be careful what you hitch  
them to. The thing you’re claiming has a way of reaching back  
and claiming you.*

~ A.L. Kitselman

## INTRODUCTION

The past is one’s foundation toward building a stronger tomorrow. It is alarming to know that the knowledge of our history and culture is rapidly disappearing, especially among our minority students. Why is this trend occurring? Unfortunately today, regardless of the reasons, many of our family members are scattered around the world. Whether it’s in a different city, state, and country or on a different continent, keeping close family ties and preserving one’s family history and colorful stories is challenging. Why have these become challenging? These challenges arise because in a family there are often one or two designated people (e.g. grandmother or grandfather) who are what one would call the “keeper of the flame,” or the family’s historian.

However, when that member becomes ill or even worse dies, he or she is no longer able to share and pass down these family stories, resulting in the loss of all portrayals of that family’s history. In other words, when that person passes away, if the history is not documented, either in writing, photographs, audio tapes, or some other means of communication, the history of the family often dies with that person. So I ask: what impact does knowing your history have on your present and future decisions? Since I believe it is through your history that you become aware of your responsibility to your family, your community, and society, this will be the primary focus of this unit.

In a time where students are told not to question authority, or “do as I say and not as I do,” their ability to think critically about the world they live in slowly, but steadily diminishes. Students are often granted access to a critical dialogue or are acclimatized to deem the familiar as the inexorable. Yet, they are still too often deprived of the right to use their preferred means of expression which would allow them to be a vital participant in their families, their communities, and ultimately in society. Students are often unaware of their history and are left unequipped to shape it.

But how can we as educators change the fate of our students, when we too are conditioned by a test-driven society that tells us that they are only as intelligent as their test scores? If we look to our past, for example, during the Civil Rights Movement, students used their voices as a means of power and demanded to be heard. However, back then students were not alone in their quest for justice and equality; their families and communities played a vital role in their search for a better (educated) life. They all understood the importance of knowing their history and knowing that with this knowledge of the past, the road toward a better future could be paved. Furthermore, they

were aware of the fact that their life choices impacted not only them but also their parent(s), communities, and children. An article found online at <http://historyeducationinfo.com/edu10.htm>, *A Look Back at American Education* states:

But we can still learn much about education by examining the way our ancestors were schooled. In some respects, parents may actually want to encourage their school officials to duplicate some of the old, tried-and-true methods of shaping young minds. . . . It was a time when parents and other community residents pulled together to build and maintain their schools.

However, unlike the past, our current educational system has the propensity to be more centralized and less personalized. Yet how can one aim for a prosperous future when they do not have the knowledge and the means to accurately access their past? Moreover, how can educators encourage their students to strive for more, if they too are inadequately informed or if they choose to ignore the dynamics of a continuously growing, culturally diverse system?

## THE STATISTICS

The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) estimated that people of color made up 28% of the nation's population in 2000, and predicts that they would make up 38% in 2025, and 47% in 2050. Yet we continue to fail our students both academically and socially by not considering and making use of their history during the educational process. American classrooms are experiencing the largest influx of immigrant students since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These statistics have become a reflection of what not only my classroom looks like, but what many classrooms across our nation look like as well (U. S. Census Bureau).

About a million immigrants are making the U.S. their home each year (Martin and Midgley, 1999). It is because of these facts, we, as an educational system and educators, can no longer take omitting our students' cultural histories lightly. The influence of an increasingly ethnically diverse population on the nation's schools is and will continue to be enormous (Martin and Midgley, 1999).

In an ideal setting, the education of young people is the collaboration between the school, the home, and the community. This is not an easy task to accomplish, and unfortunately students are suffering the consequences. Yet as educators, how can we help to strengthen the relationships between our students and their families, their communities, and their overall school experience? How can we help our students to connect and more importantly want to stay connected? Experts suggest when family and community become involved in students' school activities, their academic and personal achievements excel, as addressed in *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp:

When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, and support parent involvement at home and school, students make greater gains. When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns, honor their contributions, and share power, they succeed in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement. And when families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, school districts make positive changes in policy, practice, and resources. (14)

These strategies can also be implemented when trying to establish student-teacher and teacher-parent relations.

Research after research consistently agrees that a major component in students' overall achievement relies on the active involvement of both community and family. However, research

also indicates that besides family and community involvement, educators and educational systems must also have a keen understanding of how culture plays a major role in student achievement.

As the article found at <http://historyeducationinfo.com/edu10.htm>, *A Look Back at American Education*, states, “But the history of education shows that schools must retain a ‘personal touch’ in order to be relevant in their students’ lives.” In order to gain as well as retain a “personal touch” with our students, it is imperative that we, as educators, inquire about their histories and the contributions they have made in shaping this nation, by talking with parents and grandparents, attending community functions, and being accessible. As educators we are obligated to provide students with as many positive opportunities and experiences inside as well as outside of the classroom as possible. As a result students are now able to make thoughtful and informed decisions about their lives, making them more equipped to positively participate in the world.

## **MY STUDENTS**

Over the past decade, we have seen a steady breakdown between the school, family, and community in which our students attend, live, and participate. The result of this continuous breakdown is students’ susceptibility to negative influences such as gangs, drugs, violence, and victimization.

Today students’ are continuously experiencing low self-esteem and negative outlooks on life. In addition, their stance on family and education has shifted significantly, and grades and positive relationships are the least of their concerns. Several studies have shown that students and families alike who are actively involved in school activities are likely to do well academically and less likely to get into trouble (Berk 372). However, students are now forced to focus more on surviving the countless temptations that await them after the school-bell rings. Without the self-confidence and strength from their families, communities, and schools to help confront and battle those dangerous temptations that await them, they will become victims to an often unempathetic society and to a family of vultures we call gangs.

Gangs are claiming many of our youth today at an unprecedented rate. Since the early 1990s gang activity has risen throughout Houston, Texas. One area in particular where an increase is prominent is in the Southwest region of Houston; the fastest growing groups in gang membership today are minorities (African Americans and Hispanic-Americans) ranging from ten years of age through seventeen years of age. These kids suffer from low self-esteem and issues of belonging. These are the profiles of my students at Sharpstown Middle School. They are neither “bad” students nor are they violent students; they are misguided students. They are students who reject the “one-size-fits-all” method of education, as rightfully they should. In fact, what they should see is that many of these kids are highly intelligent.

As a minority myself, I often seek to know more about the history of my people, my gender, and my orientation as many middle school age students do. We all long to be able to identify ourselves with a socially popular group. Unfortunately, some of those recognizable groups are not always positive or work in our best interest. At least 87% of my students fall within the “minority,” which is the “majority” category at my school. They are at risk. Consequently, not many of our teachers can say the same, making it difficult to empathize, understand and/or relate to the decisions, attitudes, and behaviors our students often demonstrate inside and outside of the classroom. Instead, these students are viewed as trouble makers, underachievers and potential gang “bangers.” However, since the system refuses to adapt to these students, alternate educational opportunities continue to be unavailable.

Regrettably, this continuous unavailability of resources for such students within our educational system, often leads them to find pleasure and pride in claiming a color, a sign, and/or a turf. Gangs have become a refuge for many of our students. Gangs have replaced families;

gangs have become their teacher, their security, their means of survival, and, yes, their future. Our students are trusting in a lifestyle that many of them know nothing about. Yet my question remains, why is an activity that is so conspicuously destructive be also so vastly desirable that our students would denounce their own families to identify themselves with a gang “family”?

James Baldwin, a great writer, once said, “Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go,” and I believe it is in these words that the answer to my question rests. I am Deborah Lynne Andrépoint, a Special Education Teacher of Reading and Language Arts at Sharpstown Middle School. My goal is to connect students with their pasts so that they can make better choices about their future, reclaim their lives, and honorably say “I am...”

## **MY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Times have changed since I attended school. Education, family, and community were important; students had direction or at least professed to have direction. Competition was ongoing given that having notable grades was something we all strived for. There was nobility for making “the mark,” and our peers as well as our families respected us for it. As long as I can remember, family played an important role in my maintaining my grades and in how I felt about education. My sister and I, although she was older, always competed for the better grade. We were often rewarded with material things (mainly money), but the real reward for me came from inside.

It wasn’t the praise or the money; it was the internal reward that I got when I knew I set a goal and accomplished it. Of course, I had lots of encouragement from family and friends, but it was that feeling I had inside that became the ultimate incentive. Even as I entered college, it was that internal feeling that I always strived for. Back then I didn’t make the connection of that feeling and my ongoing success in school and in life. But today, although family and friends are essential to one’s success or not, the importance of being able to depend on oneself to determine one’s good fortune and well-being is critical.

## **MY GOAL**

The academic goal of this unit is to teach students how to create autobiographies and biographies through various means of expression and to improve on writing skills, reading skills, and research skills. This will be accomplished by revisiting their past, reflecting on their lives, gaining an understanding, accepting the consequences and/or recompenses of their actions, taking ownership of their communities, and respecting other communities as well. In short, students begin to develop meaningful connections between school life and life outside of school. However, in order for such a transition to occur or start to develop, I believe it must first start within our own classroom community.

Students need to be shown models of what is expected of them, what is acceptable and what is not in one’s own community. I would not only guide my students through this process of unity, reflection, ownership and self-awareness but also be an active participant in the journey. As a classroom “family,” we will travel together looking to our past and our families’ past so that we can begin to build, rebuild, and strengthen foundations that will ultimately lead us on a path of success that will extend far beyond the classroom.

## **GENERAL METHOD OF APPROACH**

This unit will allow us to examine and define a family; explore our community; seek out the truth, whether good or bad, about ourselves while gaining a genuine understanding about where we come from, where we want to go, what is our place in our community, and how can we

become positive participant in that community; and ultimately understand who we are and how in life we eventually “come full circle.”

The unit will apply both autobiographical and biographical writing strategies and examples of these genres in pursuing these goals. While improving writing skills will be the core of many of the lessons and activities, the unit will be interdisciplinary in approach. The tools we will use to record this extraordinary expedition is writing, art, music, speech, and technology. I have chosen these tools because the students I teach have an array of learning abilities; however, by finding their medium of expression each one will have the opportunity to “shine” and be proud of their work, hence, beginning to build self-esteem.

Although everyone is not a great writer, many are magnificent artists. Others can rap a song like it was second nature. There are extraordinary orators that sit among my students, and there are those who were born to manipulate technology and produce visuals so inviting to the eye you want them to do everything using technology. However, since writing is my preferable medium, I believe it to be one of the most personal forms of expression we have. In writing one can acknowledge, confront, praise, and reveal his or her most intimate self without ever having to say or share it with anyone. In writing we are honest. It gives us a chance to reflect on our lives as so many of our students, especially middle school-age students, often fail to do.

This curriculum unit will be used over a nine-week time frame (preferable spring semester) covering several TAKS and SDAA (special education curriculum) objectives required by HISD and Texas. However, the delivery will not be the “one-size-fits all” model; in fact the implementation of the unit will not only excite the students about learning but also give educators as well as administrators a fresh new approach to teach reading, writing, history, character education, art, music, and multiculturalism.

The unit will be delivered in sections relevant to the major focal points to be discussed. Each major lesson will begin with a mini lesson in which activities will include, but not be limited to, archived newspaper articles, old photos, biographies, and autobiographies. Guest speakers from the community will be invited into the class to share stories, and fieldtrips will be scheduled allowing students to have access to primary source artifacts. These artifacts will increase their understanding of the importance of obtaining reliable sources of information and begin to connect with the concept that what they do *today*, someone else did *yesterday*, and someone will do it again *tomorrow*.

## **GETTING STARTED**

Each day the students will enter the classroom with some type of “hook” that will lead them into the lesson. The “hook” will also be designed to provoke one or more of the senses. For example, one day students may enter the classroom, and music will be playing in the background from their parents’ and grandparents’ time period. Students will then be asked to identify any similarities in the music they listen to with the music their parents and/or grandparents listened to. On another occasion students may be shown a series of slides called “A Blast from the Past,” which I will develop to reflect my students’ ethnic backgrounds (the purpose is for them to connect with the past.) After they have viewed the slide show, students will be instructed to briefly write a word, feeling, or thought about the slide. Students will be asked to share their information as the whole class begins a discussion on how we are all linked in one way or another.

From the onset, students will have to begin to develop their reflective and critical-thinking skills. In each segment of the unit, students will be required to complete a pre-activity questionnaire accompanied by a pre-selected reading passage that will touch on issues that are reflective of the questions. After each reading students will pair off in groups and discuss the

selected reading. In each group students will be expected to find examples that answer the questionnaire and compare their real-life answers with those of the characters in the reading. However, students will answer questions prior to the reading so that they will not be influenced by situations found in the readings.

The first series of questioning will be called “Creating Self,” with a text selection taken from Lois Lowery’s *Number the Stars*. Here students will have the opportunity to think about things that will promote a positive as well as a negative identity status and/or emotional well-being.

1. How do we shape our own identities?
2. How do we characterize ourselves?
3. How can we learn about ourselves through the lives of others?
4. How do other people’s perceptions of ourselves influence our perception of self?
5. How can major life changing events in childhood, influence the course to teenage years and adulthood?
6. In a society where we are engulfed with outside influences trying to shape our lives, how can individual decision-making be accomplished?

Second series of questions is “Choices, Conduct, and Consequences.” This line of questions will provoke students to start thinking about taking ownership of their conduct and how those choices and conduct influence their future and everything around them. Students will read from the autobiography by Ruby Bridges, *Through My Eyes*.

1. How do choices relate to consequences?
2. How does one learn to make good choices?
3. How does one’s choices and conduct obstruct the course of a person’s life?
4. How can choices, conduct, and consequences differ from view-point to view-point?

In the third series of questions, “Dealings: Personal and Community Relationships,” students are encouraged to focus on what are relationships (family)? What kinds of relationships are there? How do they define their relationship with their own community and their school community? They are asked to discuss in small groups the following questions:

1. What are the elements that build a strong friendship and community? Compare and contrast the elements of the two.
2. How does friendship change as we grow older? Compare and contrast a friend at age 6 and at age 13.
3. What influences do families, friends, and communities have on friendships over the course of one’s life?
4. How are people transformed through their relationships with others?
5. What is community, and what are your responsibilities to your community as well as your community’s responsibilities to you?

After answering these questions, students will then read passages from Francisco Jimenez’s *The Circuit* and *Breaking Through*, where they will explore different situations that make a family close, that can break families apart, and how people on the outside impacts the family both negatively and positively.

In the fourth series of questions, “Past, Present, and Future,” students should have begun developing an awareness of self and ones responsibilities to family, community, and self. These questions will allow students to reflect on their past and pinpoint decisions that are impacting their current positions as well as their future positions in life. Again in small groups students are asked to discuss and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think it is important to understand the past, present, or future?
2. How does knowing the past influence the present and/or the future?
3. What are some repeated images/motifs from the past, and in what ways have they changed and/or stayed the same?

Students will use information from archive newspapers and search for things that have happened when their parents were their age and compare them to current events that they are living. Each question will be answered in two forms, written and with an illustration (cartoon format). Once all questions have been answered and discussed students will begin to compile their answers so that they can be used to construct timeline mobiles and used as the foundation for their autobiographies and interview questions for their biographies.

## **CONCLUSION**

By the end of the unit, students will be active readers, researchers, interviewers, critics—skills which will be demonstrated in the form of an autobiography and/or a biography (biographies will be of family members, someone in their community, or someone in their neighborhood they have researched). Furthermore, I would like to extend the unit by having students share their papers with each other (with permission) and select writings that are meaningful to them, that they feel could/should be put in a book of autobiographies and biographies produced by students. Finally, they will continue to use their skills by researching publishing companies that may be interested in publishing their work under the genre of young adult/teen reading.

## **A Look at Factors that Affect Identity Development: Family and Community**

### ***Family***

What is a family? There are many ways to describe a family. Families are typically defined as having a father, mother, and their children. However, families can also consist of a mother and her children only or a father and his children only, or families can also have grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousin included. According to *Wikipedia* online encyclopedia, a family is a domestic group of people (or a number of domestic groups), typically affiliated by birth or marriage, or by comparable legal relationships-including partnership, adoption, and surname, although many people including social scientists have understood family relationships in terms of “blood.” Another definition given by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 16(3) states: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society...” yet, there is no set way to describe a family.

So why are families so important to how we view ourselves and the world in which we live? From the perspective of children, the family is a family orientation. Does the construction of our family impact who we are? Very much so; the family serves to locate children socially, and plays a major role in their acculturation: a process whereby an established culture teaches an individual by repetition its accepted norms and values, so that the individual can become an accepted member of the society and find his or her suitable role. Why is knowing family history so important to one’s identity? A good family history connects with young children. Family histories are crucial when referring to medical issues.

Family stories are tales about people, places, and events related to the members of our immediate family or their ancestors. Family stories are talked about in a very informal manner; whether at the dinner table or at a family reunion, they often entertain us over and over again. They can parallel great heroic and important tales. The unforgettable tales about our lives and of the lives of other family members takes on significance since they are true stories, even if everyone passes on various accounts of a single event. These stories are family heirlooms; they are not tangible items, but information that is carried on within the heart. They are endowments

to future generations that only obligation is to honor them, preserve them by remembering them and passing them on.

### ***Community***

The term community is widely used to evoke a sense of togetherness. Look around you. Does your community resemble your lifestyle? Can others tell what community you come from just by your appearance and/or actions? A group of people living in a particular local area, sharing similar ethnic, cultural, or religious characteristics, often share the same likes and dislikes. This is a community. Sharing in this "common defense" incorporates a balance between self-interest and shared-interests within and among members of a group and is a crucial factor in community formation. When enough participants in a group develop an attitude of caring for the well-being of the whole, or the common good, the prospect of community is present. How does a community differ from a family? In what ways are families and communities alike? These are questions that are important for individuals to know in order to get a clear view of one's history and roots.

It is important to understand that whatever encourages people to work together and collaborate to start with, is not as significant in the context of community as what provokes them to maintain some sort of connection. However, according to *Wikipedia* online encyclopedia, "Resilient connections between and among people are what is important in the formation of viable communities. Successful efforts by a mix of participants tend to attract the attention of other less connected individuals who may seek to join the group that is succeeding" ("Community").

However, as individuals mature into adulthood, this changes. An ongoing collection of facts, truths, and hopefully insights finally comes together through realization. It is during the ups and downs of life that attitudes toward family, society and an understanding of how people interact with one another and within the context of community attainment occur. These changes in experience are what are referred to as socialization.

So, identification, realization, and socialization brings an individual into a position of making choices about who he or she will socialize with and under what conditions and circumstances. From the viewpoint of the individual, accepting or rejecting groups to participate with now becomes an association. When associated individuals develop the intent to give of themselves to the group and maintain all of the processes from identification to association they begin to bring into practice the first process of true community—the process of communication ("Community").

### **An Examination of the Past: The Importance of Ancestors**

The importance of the ancestors is the passing of the flame; without this flame our history becomes dimmer and dimmer with each passing year, until the flame is extinguished. In order for individuals to have a sense of belonging and self-worth, one must have some type of beacon to direct them. Once on this path the individual will have the desire to keep the flame alive and proudly pass it on to the next generation.

### **A Look at the Present: Ancestral Influences on Today**

In many cultures death is not thought of as the end of human relationships. Rather, those who die enter the spirit world in which they are invisible. Unfortunately today students fail to realize the influences that ancestors play in their parents and/or grandparents' everyday lives. Among the younger generations honoring one's ancestors is of little importance unless the elders of the family practice such rituals on a daily basis.



Students today need to be aware of the many ways elders look at ancestors and respect their contributions to the success of their lives. For example, this is seen in many Asian communities, as mentioned in the article *Feeding the Ancestors* by Nuong Van Dinh Tran:

For Vietnamese people, as well as many other Asians, Africans and indigenous people around the world, honoring our ancestors is a way of acknowledging that our lives, our strengths, our possibilities are, in many ways, due to the labors, the loves and the sacrifices of those who came before us. Our struggles are not new struggles and our pains are not new pains. Someone before us has walked part of our road already and they understand. And they help.

This is what our students need to get a good understanding, which in turn may encourage them to make better choices and to actually think before they act.

### **Predicting the Future: Today's Choices, Tomorrow's Conduct**

Keeping family ties viable allows future generations to not only have a means to access their history but also give them the means to learn from it as well. This is important when looking at one's responsibilities within the family and within one's community.

Many individuals, especially adolescents, fail to realize the impact of their actions and how those actions affect not only what they do today but also how they act in the future. Often times we hear students say, "Who is it going to hurt anyway," or "I'm only hurting myself," but this is not true. Students need to understand the misconduct they choose to participate in follows them throughout their lifetime as well as their family's life and the lives of their unborn children. It is important as educators that we instill in students that they must be very careful of their decision making, of their associations, and of their actions because the past has a way of coming back to them.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan One: Who Am I, Really?**

#### ***Subject Areas***

Writing, reading, history, art, technology, and character education

#### ***Objectives***

In this lesson, the student will:

- Begin to think about the things that make the student who he or she is.
- Research family history.
- Create a mobile time line of important events in his or her family's life.

#### ***Allotted Time***

Two 90- minute class periods

#### ***Materials***

##### Teacher

Whiteboard/chalkboard or large post-it-notes and some type of writing tool

##### Student

This lesson is designed so that students can use their creativity through art. Students may use pictures, drawings, newspaper clippings, etc. to design their mobile timelines. However, they will also need to have the following available: multicolored construction paper, scissors, markers, crayons or map pencils, rulers, adhesive, straws, string or yarn, paper-clips,

instructions on how to create the mobile as well as a model of a finished mobile. Students should also have a rubric so that they have clear and precise expectation of the grading scale. By having a rubric available, students are responsible for how much or how little they want to do resulting in taking ownership of their work and grade.

### ***Lesson: Day 1***

1. Begin lesson as a whole class discussion. On the board or post-it-note write the question(s): Who am I? and What are the things that made me this way? As students answer, write down the responses on the board so the class can see. While writing the responses, try to categorize them so that they can be used in future lessons. For example, things we have in common to show connected-ness.
2. Explain that some of things we do comes from family, community, and/or peers. Use examples such as “I’m very serious about education,” because my mom used to always tell me, “Get your education that’s the only way to success,” or you may want to solicit examples from your students.
3. Define Family History and ask students why they think it’s important.
4. Have students write down ten things about themselves.
5. Explain to students that they will be using those questions to see if anyone else in their family also had these characteristics, habits, concerns, etc. when they were their age. (This activity provokes students to inquire about family and open communication with parents and/or other relatives)
6. Finally, students will begin to draft a design for their mobiles. Students may use computers or pencil and paper to plan and draft their designs.
7. Optional, teachers may want to revisit discussion and focus on key points of the lesson. Teachers may also want to make sure that students understand rubric and expectation of their finish product.

### ***Day 2***

1. As students enter the classroom, make sure that there is a completed mobile visual (you might want to have more than one scattered around the room). At this time, you would also hand out instructions on how to build a mobile.
2. Make sure that all materials for constructing the mobile are available to students. This class period is organized so that students may build their mobiles and present them.
3. Check to see if students completed drafts of their mobiles, brought in photos, newspaper clippings, notes, wedding invitations, birth announcements, etc. to be used in this project. At this point, students should have all material compiled according to the event in chronological order.
4. Allow students to work in groups or individually; however, make sure they are working.
5. Provide students with a check list to ensure that they are working according to rubrics. You might want to tell students to have their rubrics out so they can be clear of expectations and possible grades according to the work done.
6. Finally, students will prepare to share their mobile with the class then turn in their assignment. If time permits, allow students to hang mobiles around the class if desired.

Note: Depending on student’s ability to work independently, you may need to extend lesson time frame.

## **Lesson Plan Two: Treasure Hunting: Finding Value in Family Stories**

### ***Subject Areas***

Writing, reading, history, art, technology, and listening skills

### ***Vocabulary***

Heirlooms, generation, ancestor, interview, documentation

### **Objectives**

In this lesson, the student will:

- Use communication skills to gather information from relatives about who is the family's story teller (s).
- Interview the person(s) that the family designates to be the family's story teller.
- Use listening skill to accurately document information.
- Write his or her own family story using the information gathered from relatives.

### ***Allotted Time***

Three 90-minute class periods

### ***Materials***

Whiteboard/chalkboard and writing utensils

Pre-written interview questions, audio equipment and tapes (if available), disposable cameras (if available), small writing tablets (so students can write down responses)

### ***Lesson Day 1***

1. Have students listen to the story of Cobin Harney and his musical messages of taking care of "Mother Earth" at the *Circle of Stories* web site, <<http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories>>.
2. Have student pay strict attention to how Harney tells his story and how he delivers it (what medium does he use to tell the stories).
3. After listening to interview, have a discussion with students about the different ways they can demonstrate a family history. See if students remember some of the ways demonstrated in the interview.

### ***Lesson Day 2***

1. As students enter the classroom, handout pre-written interview questions as well as overview the importance of family stories. (Students may add to questions; however, make sure that they are questions that are sensitive to the person they are to interview.)
2. On the board write vocabulary that students need to know. Ask student what they know about doing personal interviews. Solicit explanations. Students may talk about an interview they've seen of their favorite movie star or singer. The key is to get students talking.
3. The major part of the activities will be done at home. Students will choose a relative to interview.
4. Provide student with checklist so that they remember to ask specific questions, write down dates, events, and any other important information they may need for final presentations.
5. Give students time to decide how they want to present their projects

### ***Lesson Day 3***

1. This day is dedicated to presentation only.
2. As students enter the room, use a hat, box, or other enclosed container from which students will pick a piece a paper that will tell the order of presentation.
3. Students may invite parents, the person they interviewed, other teachers, principals, etc. to share in their presentation.
4. Finally have students turn in presentations.
5. If relatives come to presentations, allot time for gathering and discussion after all projects have been presented.

### **Lesson Plan 3: A Blast from the Past**

#### ***Subject Areas***

Writing, reading, history, art, technology, and music

#### ***Vocabulary***

Primary sources, secondary sources, artifacts, historical fiction

#### ***Objectives***

In this lesson, the student will:

- Compare and Contrast events of the past with current events.
- Research different trends and fads of past generations.
- Use information found on the Internet as well as in archived newspapers to gain an understanding of primary resources.

#### ***Allotted Time***

90 minute class period

#### ***Materials***

##### Teacher

Whiteboard/chalkboard or large post-it-notes and some type of writing tool, computer, power-point slides, 50s and 60s music, CD player

##### Student

Internet access, newspapers, highlighters, paper and pencil, construction paper, glue, map pencils, and scissors.

#### ***Lesson***

This lesson is designed to provoke students to think about things that they have in common with their parents, and/or grandparents. They will compare and contrast different events throughout history with current events. They will also have to identify recurring motifs and themes seen throughout history.

1. Have students enter classroom to the sound of music playing in the background from their parents' and grandparents' time period.
2. Ask students to identify any similarities in the music they listen to with the music their parents and/or grandparents listened to.

3. Have students watch a power-point presentation: a series of slides called “A Blast from the Past,” which I will develop to reflect my students’ ethnic backgrounds (the purpose is for them to connect with the past.)
4. After they have viewed the slide show, instruct students to briefly write a word, feeling, or thought about the slide.
5. Ask students to share their information as the whole class begins a discussion on how we are all linked in one way or another.
6. After instructions, allow students to explore newspapers and internet (designate sites) to find pictures, articles, etc. that represent both their time period and their parents/grandparents.
7. Have students use information to create a collage and present it to the class.

### ***Alternative Lesson Activities***

1. Have students write a letter to their unborn child. Have them answer questions such as: what do I want my child to know about me? What was I most proud of? What would I like to leave behind for my child?
2. Have students create a family tree or pedigree chart.
3. Have students write a personal autobiography.
4. Have students draw a self-portrait representing their life.
5. Have students perform skits or plays that represent an event in their family’s life.

### **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

#### **Works Cited**

- Berk, Laura E. *Development through the Lifespan*. New York: Allyn and Bacon, 2006.
- Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999.
- “Community.” *Wikipedia*. 2006. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/community>>.
- “Family.” *Wikipedia*. 2006. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family>>.
- Harney, Corbin. *Circle of Stories*. 2006. <<http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories>>.
- Henderson, Anne T., and Karen L. Mapp. *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Austin: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, 2002.
- Jimenez, Francisco. *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.
- . *Breaking Through*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
- Kitselman, A. L. *The Quotations Page. QuotationsPage.com by Michael Moncur. 2005.* <[http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/A.\\_L.\\_Kitselman/](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/A._L._Kitselman/)>.
- “A Look Back at American Education.” *historyinfo.com*. NA Media. 2006. <<http://historyeducationinfo.com/edu10.htm>>.
- Lowery, Lois. *Number the Stars*. New York: Laurel Leaf Books, 1998.
- Martin, P., and E. Midgely. *Immigration to the United States. Population Bulletin. 54.2*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1999: 1-44.
- Tran, Nuong Van Dihn. “Feeding the Ancestors.” Interview with the Veterans of Hope Project. <[http://www.veteransofhope.org/section3\\_models/model4a.htm](http://www.veteransofhope.org/section3_models/model4a.htm)>.
- “Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 16 (3).” 10 December 1948. *All Human Rights for All*. <<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>.

U. S. Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (120<sup>th</sup> ed.) Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 2000.

### **Supplemental Sources**

#### **Sources for Teachers**

Burroughs, Tony. *Black Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Carnes, Jim, Harry Blackmun, and Herbert Tauss. *Us and Them: A History of Intolerance in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Roberson, Houston. *The Shadow of Hate: A History of Intolerance in America*. Teacher's Guide.

Taylor, Maureen. *Through the Eyes of Your Ancestors: A Step-By-Step Guide to Uncovering Your Family's History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.

*The Riverside Dictionary of Biography*. New York: The American Heritage Dictionaries, 2004.

The Riverside Dictionary of Biography includes more than 10,000 people from around the globe and from all periods of history. All continents, fields of endeavor, and historical eras are richly represented: The person's full name, birth and death dates, nationality, and occupation are given, orienting the reader at a glance to the essential biographical data. Details of the person's life, education, and achievements follow, along with information on the historical milieu in which he or she was active.

#### **Web Sources**

PBS. *Online Ancestors Teacher's Guide*. 2006. <<http://www.pbs.org/kbyu/ancestors>>.

The *Ancestors Teacher's Guide* offers lessons adaptable to a variety of subjects. Each lesson consists of educational objectives, key concepts and student activities. Handouts, charts and worksheets are included. The guide also introduces new vocabulary and research skills that are applicable beyond family history.

*Slavery and the making of America*. Thirteen/WNET: New York. 2004. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/>>.

Documenting the history of American slavery from its beginnings in the British colonies to its end in the Southern states and the years of post-Civil War Reconstruction, this companion website to the four-part television series offers an interactive timeline, slave memories, and an extensive educational section.

Kunhardt Productions. *Freedom A History of Us*. Chappaqua, NY. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/>>.

From the producers of African American Lives, this comprehensive companion site to the sixteen-part series documenting the history of America through its struggles for human liberty contains numerous multimedia web episodes that chronologically document important eras in the history of freedom in the United States through video, photographs, documents, audio clips, interactive games, and more.

#### **Books for Students**

Augenbraum, Harold and Ilan Stavans. *Growing up Latino*. Mariner Books, Feb 1993.

The authors who contribute to this volume transport the reader across geographies and through cultures in an attempt to articulate the joys, struggles, defeats, and triumphs of the Latino experience in the United States. *Growing up Latino* offers, for the first time, a comprehensive collection of classic and recent Latino writing in English, converging in sometimes shocking, often funny, and always stirring memoirs and stories.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage Books: New York, 1984.

Vignettes told through the eyes of a young Latino girl growing up in Chicago.

Choi, Sook-Nyul. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*. New York: Yearling, 1993.

This autobiographical story tells of ten-year-old Sookan and her family's suffering and humiliation in Korea, first under Japanese rule and after the Russians invade, and of a harrowing escape to South Korea.

Cofer-Ortiz, Judith. *An Island Like You, Stories of the Barrio*. New York: Penguin Group, 1995.

Stories told the eyes of Latino children

Fradin, Dennis Brindell, and Judith Bloom Fradin. *Fight On!: Mary Church Terrell's Battle for Integration*. New York: Clarion Books, 2003.

The acclaimed civil rights leader Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954) is brought vividly to life in this well researched and compelling biography.

Hesse, Karen. *Out the Dust*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997.

Written in free-verse poem style allows the student to see how to use description and emotions to make writing elaborate and vivid.

- Houston, D. James, and Jeanne Houston-Wakatsuki. *Farewell to Manzanar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.  
At age thirty-seven, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recalls life at Manzanar through the eyes of the child she was. She tells of her fear, confusion, and bewilderment as well as the dignity and great resourcefulness of people in oppressive and demeaning circumstances. Written with her husband, Jeanne delivers a powerful first-person account that reveals her search for the meaning of Manzanar.
- In Their Own Words: High-Interest Celebrity Bios*. Saddleback Educational Inc: Irvine CA, 2005.  
Biography series makes historical figures real for today's student by quoting extensively from journals and letters. Each book is illustrated with photographs, maps and drawings connecting the student with the artist.
- Johnston, Tony. *Any Small Goodness*. New York: Blue Sky Press, 2001.
- Jurmain, Susan. *The Forbidden Schoolhouse: The True and Dramatic Story of Prudence Crandall and Her Students*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.  
Exciting and eye-opening, this account of the heroine of Canterbury, Connecticut, and her elegant white schoolhouse at the center of town will give readers a glimpse of what it is like to try to change the world when few agree with you.
- Lyons, E. Mary. *Catching the Fire: Philip Simmons, Blacksmith*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1997.  
Researching the book with intricate care, Lyons visited frequently with Simmons and his coworkers. Using the artist's own words, she has pulled together not only a vision of the man and his work, but the story of his life.
- Murphy, Jim. *A Young Patriot: The American Revolution as Experienced by One Boy*. New York: Clarion Books, 1996.  
Vivid black and white photographs and background details add to the compelling wartime memoirs of Joseph Plumb Martin, a fifteen-year-old Connecticut farm boy who enlisted in the revolutionary army in the summer of 1776.
- Orgill, Roxane, and Leonard Jenkins. *If I Only Had a Horn: Young Louis Armstrong*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.  
Vivid words and dramatic pictures combine to tell the story of a boy who grew up to be a giant of jazz - the legendary Louis Armstrong.

#### **Audiotape**

- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Prod. Robert Kessler. Random House, 1998.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *Miracle's Boys*. Prod. David Rapkin. Listening Library, an imprint of the Random House Audio Publishing Group, 2001.

#### **Filmography**

- The Shadow of Hate*, Dir. Charles Guggenheim. Montgomery, Alabama 1995.
- A Place at the Table*, Dir. Hudson & Houston. Montgomery, Alabama 2000.
- Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives*, Dir. Jacqueline Glover and Thomas Lennon. HBO/Time Warner Entertainment 2003.
- Ancestors*, PBS Programming Series 2005.