

## Through the Lens

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### DESCRIPTION OF STUDENTS

My students are in sixth grade and are designated Gifted and Talented (G/T); they attend accelerated classes in all subjects as part of the K-8 Vanguard program at T. H. Rogers School in Houston. In addition to G/T, our school houses two additional programs: multiply impaired and the regional school for deaf students. Both programs begin instruction when students are about three years old; the deaf students stay until they begin high school, but the multiply impaired students remain until they are 22. Our population is very diverse, comprised of Asian, Latino, African-American, and Caucasian students; in fact, over 50 languages and/or dialects are spoken in the homes of our students. This unit was designed to reflect the diversity of the student body on one level as well as create a common bond among students. It was also designed to address the social and emotional needs of gifted students who are typically egocentric and need instruction and experiences that provide opportunities to develop empathy for situations with which they may have no real connection. We are fortunate that our diverse populations offer our G/T students opportunities to work with students who have physical and/or intellectual challenges.

### BASIC CURRICULUM UNIT

One of our Language Arts curriculum elements is a service unit for sixth graders; this unit affords them the time to leave English and Reading classes in order to serve children in programs throughout the school: the multiply impaired (both hearing and deaf), the hearing impaired students (both profound and partial hearing), and elementary Vanguard students. In order to prepare our students for service, we require that they read a biography or autobiography of someone who has performed service. Using information they gather about that person from both the biography and Internet research, students produce a number of products including a response to a study guide, poetry, a short story, and a “bio-board” (a depiction of the person in his/her service setting).

While the assignments for this unit enhance students’ understanding of service on one level, they continue to have a narrow view of the service that the character has performed. For example, Corrie Ten Boom’s autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, provides students with an appreciation of her specific efforts to protect Jews during World War II; however, in middle school students do not have a clear or thorough view of the historical context – they are not aware of specific events/movements that actually led to the Holocaust. Additionally, their appreciation of the issue/situation ends with the last page of Ten Boom’s account, and they do not extrapolate and associate subsequent events in our own culture to the issues of the Holocaust.

In addition to addressing particular social or political concerns, this unit also provides students the opportunity to delve into photographic archives and to view, perhaps for the first time, historic moments captured on film. Consider major events of the 20th century: civil rights marches, the Kennedy assassination, the Cuban missile crisis, the Hindenburg disaster, the stock market crash, and so many others. We may not be able to remember everything that was written about these events, but we can picture them regardless of where we were because of the moving

photographs and films that recorded the action. From the 180s, when photographs were allowed as testimony in court trials until the 9/11 and tsunami disasters, pictures have become an integral part of the story, etching both good and bad moments into our memories. As Goldberg commented on the effectiveness of photographs and their effect upon social reform, “Photographs could say, did say, what social science reports could not, and more dramatically” (179). This documentary project will allow students to study and use visual images to teach others about the history and current state of many social problems.

### **ENHANCED CURRICULUM UNIT**

In order to enhance this unit and provide the depth and complexity that is required of G/T curriculum, I am adding a documentary module to the sixth grade curriculum. Each of my classes will choose a person to research and produce a three-part documentary film using photographs, film clips, and an original dramatic depiction of the person of service they are studying. Each class will be divided into three groups. One group will research and produce a film segment that investigates the background of the issue in which the person was involved. The second group will produce a docudrama based on the service activities of the biographical subject. The third group will examine the impact the issue has on our lives today. Finally, the three segments will be merged into one film.

### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM UNIT: CORRIE TEN BOOM**

The basis of my unit extension will, of course, be the biography/autobiography that students have read, but they will be required to examine this character’s life in the context of past and future. That is, students must determine why the service was necessary in the first place. For example, why did Corrie Ten Boom feel compelled to shelter Jews from the Germans? What was happening in Germany at the time? How had Hitler gained power? What was the reaction of the rest of the world? In other words, what were the circumstances that precipitated the need for individuals to act independently and face personal danger in order to provide a refuge for victims of Hitler’s atrocities? Was Ten Boom the only “hero,” or were there others who endangered their own lives for the welfare of others?

Additionally, I want students to portray the (auto)biographical subject’s particular brand of service. For example, I would ask them to examine Corrie Ten Boom’s life and create a filmed depiction of events that would educate/inform other students as to her motivation, sacrifices, and consequences. In doing this, students would be required to look at events in her book and “construct” a typical episode of her life (or docudrama) that would guide others to understanding her contribution.

Finally, I want students to examine the issues as they stand today and ask themselves if remnants of the past have survived, and, if so, how they are manifested in our time. If we define the Nazi regime as the archetype of hate groups, then what other organizations have had similar success in attacking particular groups of people based on race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual preference? I would expect students to encounter information on neo-Nazi groups and the Ku Klux Klan as they progress in their research. I would also expect students to become aware that some of these crimes are viewed as hate crimes by our government and are treated differently within our legal and judicial systems. At this point in the film, students may elect to present both sides of the hate crime debate issue: should particular crimes be treated as hate crimes based on the motivation of the perpetrator? Or students could elect simply to reveal the nature of hate crimes in our society.

### **DEFINITION OF SERVICE**

After implementing the service unit for the first time, it became apparent that the term “service” must be clearly defined for the students. Our definition of service is quite broad; it may

include service directly with others, or it may include the establishment of service organizations that strive to effect changes in the lives of others. One specific qualification of the definition, however, is that the service should not be a direct result or application of one's primary occupation. For example, we often talk of service to our nation when referring to presidents, but simply being president does not qualify a person for service under our definition. Jimmy Carter is an acceptable subject, not because of his presidency, but because he has dedicated his post-presidential years to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. Likewise, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, is an acceptable candidate because of his foundation's efforts to challenge the problems in Africa.

Another facet of our definition is that the person should not be someone who has been studied throughout elementary school; I want students to investigate someone relatively unknown to them in order to broaden their knowledge. For example, I have not included Martin Luther King, Jr. or Harriet Tubman on the list; many students are able to recount major events in their lives from projects they have completed in elementary classes. Biographies are handled on a case-by-case basis; students may bring in books not on the master list as long as they can justify the service aspect of the person's life. I especially encourage students to select books about people from their cultures who have outstanding reputations in service. Not only does this encourage students to examine people from their homelands and introduce them to the rest of us, but it also encourages parents to become more engaged in this project.

A few of the social activists who make good subjects include:

- Cesar Chavez: Protector and organizer of migrant farm workers
- Louisa May Alcott: Civil War nurse
- Nelson Mandela: Enemy of apartheid
- Roberto Clemente: Relief worker for his homeland
- Jane Addams: Welcoming arms for the poor and disenfranchised
- Ida B. Wells: Outspoken critic of lynchings
- Gandhi: Human Rights
- Margaret Bourke-White: Photographer of the human condition
- Pablo Casals: Musical protest
- Dorothea Dix: Crusader for the mentally ill
- Rachel Carson: Preserver of the environment
- Dolley Madison: Protector of war orphans
- Jose Marti: Cuban patriot
- Diego Rivera: Political voice through paint
- Sarah Bagley: Textile Workers Organizer
- Clara Barton: Founder of the Red Cross

## **RATIONALE FOR UNIT**

This documentary unit will challenge students to examine important social issues in the world: past, present, and future. Rather than reading about the "isolated" experience of one person, students will be able to construct a context for that person's service, and, hopefully, to gain a deeper understanding of historical events they read about rather casually. Furthermore, the documentary is an "authentic" product that demands skill-based instruction and application as well as the depth and complexity required in pre-AP (now the required curriculum in HISD for sixth grade and above) and G/T classes.

This unit provides learning opportunities for students on many levels. First, students must use close reading skills throughout the unit; because they must apply the information they are reading, they must have a deeper understanding of what they have read. Second, students must apply effective research skills in order to find and use resources from many sources. Another

important aspect is that students must apply cooperative learning skills for an extended project on two levels: within their own group, but also among the groups in the class. Finally, students will have a myriad of opportunities to hone their writing and editing skills for a project that will be seen by others: an authentic project for a real audience.

In particular, this unit offers students the opportunity to develop skills that are necessary to find, to critically analyze, to evaluate, and to synthesize information they locate from various media sources, all higher level skills on Bloom's taxonomy. While students may use books for research, they must also access visual media sources for information; their searches and analysis will serve to strengthen their literacy skills.

A student who uses the Internet to access information, for example, will employ new technologies to locate information but will still process print. As is with the case with most websites, however, the student will encounter images as well as text. Words and images will combine to create the message and its effect. (Considine and Haley 23)

Researching sensitive issues will expose students to a variety of sources and multiple points of view; on one hand students may be initially confused and overwhelmed by the amount of information they encounter. They may also find conflicting information or opinions, perhaps for the first time. This situation will challenge students to examine the issues carefully in order to construct their truths about the issue.

[T]hese students learn to participate in the process of democracy by accessing information that they are then capable of critically analyzing and evaluating. Further, they have the skills to verify and validate the information because they can access alternative points of view and perspectives from a range of sources. Today no single, text, teacher, or website can be relied upon as the dominant source of information of authority on any given subject. (Considine and Haley 23)

Finally, this unit also addresses Howard Gardner's concern with students' multiple intelligences. The documentary offers students the opportunity to utilize their strengths, but it also requires them to address their areas of weakness. For example, the student who does not like to work in groups (interpersonal) may choose tasks that allow him to work primarily alone (intrapersonal), but in the end, his work must be incorporated into the whole, and he must participate in that integration. The student who loves to perform will have that opportunity, but he must also participate in the non-performing aspects of production. The "shy" performer may be asked to assume a role, and the performance on film is much less intimidating than performing in a crowded theater.

## **SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND PROCEDURES**

The project will be divided into three parts. The basis, of course, is the book that introduces the idea of service to the students. The unit begins by having students choose a biography/autobiography from an approved list in the school library. As they examine the choices, they will be encouraged to determine the service and choose a field in which they are genuinely interested already or one that evokes curiosity for them. For example, a music student may want to examine Pablo Casals and the impact he and his music had on the Spanish political situation. A sports enthusiast may elect to find athletes who have made a significant contribution to others; Roberto Clemente gave his life to deliver aid and supplies to earthquake devastated Nicaragua, his homeland.

Students will be given approximately two weeks to read the biography and complete the generic study guide (teacher-created) which will direct their reading to particular issues that apply to any of the people they may have chosen. In particular, they will be encouraged to examine the photographs in the books they are reading. Most of the biographies at the middle/high school

level generally contain many photographs of the person and historical events of the time. Additionally, they must access other resources to complete sections of the study guide that may not have been included in the biography; they will be encouraged to seek photographs that clearly define the life and times of the biographical figure.

After students have completed their books and study guides, they must prepare a brief presentation for the class which is actually a nomination speech for that person to be the subject of the more extensive group documentary project. The class will be aware of the purpose for the presentation: to choose a subject for the lengthier unit, the documentary. The students' initial presentations should include a picture of the person, a general account of the historical period using photographs from the book or other sources, and a general explanation of the service the person performed. The study guide that students created while reading the book will be instrumental in completing this assignment. This first round presentation should last from two to three minutes.

During these initial presentations, all students will have a list of candidates in order to record information or questions they may have during the presentations. After the presentations, students will be encouraged to "discuss" the candidates they believe will make good subjects for the documentary based on the interest students have in the topic as well as the interest that might be generated for their audience. The students will be encouraged to add what they know about the person including what may have led to the situation demanding action and the long-term effects of the service. If discussion lags, I will try to instigate further discussion by offering bits of information and/or questions that may job student thinking. Again, one of my firm suggestions is that students avoid subjects that have been studied repeatedly in elementary school and eliminate them quickly. The goal is to cull the candidates to a more manageable number, approximately five, for further discussion.

Once students understand the scope of the project, they will break into five groups; each group will be headed by the student who made the nomination of the winning candidates. Students will have one day in the computer room and an additional day in class to investigate their candidate and develop a presentation that will detail the person's life, his/her service, and, briefly, the historical context and social conditions that necessitated action. They will, of course, be able to use the original presentation board as part of their proposal.

The second presentation will occur on the following day, after students review the requirements and procedures of the documentary project. At this point, the class must consider each of the candidates. What was the situation that led to the person performing the service? What was the "value" of the service in a more global sense? What are the consequences of the situation? Was the issue resolved, or does it continue to exist? What types of sources might be available for research? As students consider these issues, they will eliminate candidates through consensus. By the end of this session, the subject for the class documentary should be chosen, and production may begin!

## **GROUP ASSIGNMENTS**

Students will be assigned to one of three groups: Definition of Issue and Situation, Docudrama, and Consequences/Long Term Effects. After the functions of each group have been described in detail, students will be asked to express a preference based on their particular interests. Additionally, one student will be nominated from each group as production manager; he/she will assume additional responsibility as liaison between groups and with me, the executive producer. The liaison must insure the following: the three segments work together and are compatible; schedules for equipment and space are assigned in advance and are not in conflict; music is suitable/compatible between film segments; and schedules are met, obstacles are overcome, and disagreements are resolved.

### **Group 1: Definition of Issue and Situation**

The group of students assigned to the issue must be able, with photographs, film clips, and narrative, to explain the situation that warranted action by the biographical character. Students must look at events in the character's life that led to service and trace the need for that service to specific conditions and/or actions. For example, in the example of Corrie Ten Boom, students must trace the rise of the Nazi party and Hitler, economic conditions in the world, the selection of Jews as scapegoats, the conditions in which the Jews were forced to live, first in Germany, and then in other countries of Europe, and so forth. They must also investigate other people who defied the Germans and protected Jews from and/or protested the Nazi sanctions against the Jews as well as other Nazi targets. Ten Boom's story takes place in Holland, but many other conscience-driven humanitarians also put their lives on the line to save others throughout Europe. Finally, they will apply their knowledge to film: writing narration/voice over and scanning and/or editing photographs and film clips into a "finished" product.

### **Group 2: Docudrama**

Students who are in the docudrama group will have the responsibility for summarizing the character's life, especially his/her service, in a scene (or scenes) that depicts the essence of the service. Bernard has characterized the docudrama as a film in which "elements [of the film] are fictionalized, even when they closely adhere to known facts. This is especially true when actors speak dialogue that is based on something other than factual transcript" (82). While specific parameters will be given to the students, they should be encouraged to look at the biography in its entirety in order to capture the character and actions of the subject in a story-telling episode. Rather than extracting one specific incident or scene from the book, students should combine incidents, build composite characters, and create a scene (or set of scenes) that will effectively relate Ten Boom's situation and the chances she took day after day to protect her Jewish guests. One of the most important aspects of the docudrama is to define the motivation that drives people to take action that threatens their own peace and security. Of course, the biography by itself may not be as complete a source as needed; students who have not read the biography must become familiar with it, but they will also have to "fill in gaps" with additional research. As a group, they will write a screenplay, assign roles, locate costumes and props, and find/create setting(s). Finally, they will actually film/edit the docudrama.

### **Group 3: Consequences/Long Term Effects**

The group of students that work on this aspect of the documentary must review the issue and situation, be aware of the biographical character's actions, and then examine the effects and/or consequences of that person's actions to determine whether or not remnants of the situation remain. In the Ten Boom example, students must determine how far they want to go with "hate" crimes. They may decide to follow up on the neo-Nazi movement; the resurgence of the Nazi party, both in the US and abroad, is certainly enough to occupy the students. However, students may elect to go further and research other "hate" groups. For example, students may focus on the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s or they may elect to look at cases of persecution in Africa, Central America, or the Middle East. The direction they take must have the approval of the class in order to maintain the focus of the project as a whole.

Students will assemble a pictorial representation of their topic, write a narrative or voice over when required, and produce a film that represents their research. This group also has a very important responsibility: constructing a conclusion for the entire film that will make sense and provide a cohesiveness for all three segments.

## CHOOSING, READING, AND INTERPRETING PHOTOGRAPHS

Images, specifically photographs, deserve their place as an integral part of this project. In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag characterizes photography as an instrument of acquisition – acquisition of information which we cannot realistically attain elsewhere.

A third form of acquisition is that, through image-making and image-duplicating machines, we can acquire something as information (rather than experience). Indeed, the importance of photographic images as the medium through which more and more events enter our experience is, finally, only a by-product of their effectiveness in furnishing knowledge dissociated from and independent of experience (156).

Students must acquire information about events with which they are unfamiliar by searching photograph files. Based on Sontag's assertion, students must be aware of the care with which they must make their choices. Since they do not have personal experience with many of the issues, they must be as vigilant as possible concerning the truths that they find or do not find in photographs. One of the most important production concerns of groups one and three is to choose photographs that illustrate the issue(s) effectively and honestly. In the article "Reading Photographs" the authors point out the importance of the moment in time represented by a photograph and, in fact, issue a warning that students must ask questions about the photos that they consider for inclusion in the project. "Depress the shutter and a moment is captured on film. But why depress the shutter at that moment? What happened just before this moment, or just after it?" (Thibault and Walbert). The authors also include important questions about photographs that students must answer before they can write an effective and honest voice-over for the visual images they elect to use.

Photographs may be chosen to initiate research, or research may dictate which photographs are chosen. For example, students researching Ruby Bridges and her struggle as a six-year old to integrate a Southern elementary school will find a myriad of photographs. Students must work together to decide which photographs will best illustrate the story – a picture of Bridges sitting alone in a classroom or protesters taunting the young girl as National Guardsmen escort her into the school. Students must use judgment when choosing photographs and/or film excerpts to illustrate the point of view they have chosen and to create the feeling they want their audience to experience.

One excellent source for film clips is television: news or news magazine shows. Many of these shows, such as *Nightline*, make copies available to the public. Additionally, there are video businesses that provide this service. However, students must be aware of the circumstances under which these news shows were produced.

[T]he evening news presents accounts of real events, real people, and real issues. But the representations again have been selected, edited, designed, packaged, and presented. They may provide slices of life, glimpses at events on any given day, but they are not the events. They are reconstructions of those events seen from a particular point of view, juxtaposed against other stories, reduced in time, disrupted by commercials, and organized with an audience in mind. (Considine and Haley 28)

## ARCHIVAL FILM INCLUSION

As students research the events that precede and follow the docudrama, they are likely to encounter opportunities to use film known as archival footage, defined by Bernard as "material [that] might have originated as news footage, a training film, an advertising piece, footage to promote a company or product, or even another documentary" (79). Most likely, students will access other documentaries that utilize news clips to illustrate their points. For example, if students were illustrating hate crimes, they would be able to find other documentaries that include

information about church burnings, cross burnings, and so forth. It is important to discuss the use of archival film with the students, particularly, Bernard warns, in maintaining the integrity of the original film (79-81). Students must observe conventional rules about archival films just as they would the printed text. “An image could not ‘stand in’ for something else, and the rules of chronological order applied to footage just as it did to facts” (Bernard 80).

### **PREPRODUCTION ISSUES**

Effective use of time and equipment is imperative for this unit. To insure efficiency, each group will be required to produce a storyboard prior to beginning the video production of the material. The following format will be used to record information for each photograph or film clip used by groups one and three.

Photo/Film Clip:
Elapsed Time (in seconds):
Voice-Over Narrative:

By using this table for every image, students will be able to easily rehearse their segment and make changes prior to actually shooting the film. It is much easier to revise on paper than to spend an inordinate amount of time editing the film itself.

Effective preproduction for the docudrama is even more critical. As the actors rehearse their dialogue and movements, students who will film the scene must determine camera angles and shot type for each piece of dialogue. During rehearsals, students will record shooting information directly onto the script for every shot.

<i>Scene 1, Shot 1:</i> Carrie and her father in clock shop, cleaning cases.
<i>Camera:</i> Waist shot of both characters in front of clock.
<i>Angle:</i> Shoot from right side to include window sign.

### **POST PRODUCTION ISSUES**

For this project, post production is defined as the period when all three segments have been shot and edited and are ready to be combined into one film. First, students must verify the integrity of each segment to insure that the sound track is perfectly synchronized, that volumes are consistent, and that, in the docudrama, the camera sequences flow smoothly. Next, the three group leaders must work together to insure that titles are consistent and that any musical soundtracks (aside from the voice-overs) create the intended mood and do not overpower speaking parts. Researchers must double check credits and bibliography. Finally, the class will hold a screening of the film in order to determine if any last minute changes need to be made.

### **CONCERNS WITH SUBJECT MATTER**

A list of biographical subjects will, of course, include individuals who tackled difficult and controversial issues. It would naturally follow, then, that students would encounter sensitive material during their research. Given the age of the students, material would have to be, in some way, censored as appropriate for the age group. Additionally, I would like the films to be shown to other students in the school, again requiring sensitivity to age and developmental level of the students.

Many questions of accessibility are answered by using materials in the school library, of course, but in many cases, the resources would be inadequate for some of the topics. Therefore, resources such as the Internet, the public library, and community organizations (such as the Holocaust Museum) must be utilized. Prior to beginning research, then, students must discuss and be made aware of “questionable” material they may encounter. For example, if students were



working on an Ida B. Wells film depicting her fight against lynchings in the US, students will encounter pictures of hangings that could not be appropriately used in the film. Rather than use photographs or film of real people in the film, students could use editorial cartoons that were prevalent during that time. While they may depict similar ideas, the fact that they are cartoons and not real people would lessen the severity of the depiction. Second, at the middle school level, research should be conducted under the supervision of the teacher and/or the computer room supervisor. Once students find pictures/articles, those sources may be printed and studied independently by the students. Teachers, librarians, and computer supervisors must control what is printed. Finally, parents should be aware of this unit and its requirements; as a general rule, we already advise parents as to research that is required in order to avoid Internet access problems.

### **COPYRIGHT GUIDELINES**

The use of copyrighted material is always an important issue to discuss with students, but it is particularly important for a project such as this documentary because students will be using a variety of media sources. As Connie Bakker suggests, securing advance permissions can become a monumental task; for some teachers, the legal constraints could represent a “deal breaking” obstacle. “Think of the number of possible items a student can incorporate into a multi-media presentation – audio, photography, video, text – and the number of permission letters these items would require” (Bakker). Fortunately, Bakker includes detailed guidelines from The Fair Use Guidelines for Education Multimedia (FUGEM) for using a variety of media, from “motion media” work to music, lyrics, and music videos. Of particular importance for this project, Bakker also outlines the venues in which student presentations can be made as well as a sample copyright notice that must appear at the beginning of a multimedia presentation. Film excerpts must adhere to the time guidelines assigned to students’ grade level. Adherence to the guidelines is a valuable lesson for students, not only for this project, but for almost any research project they may be assigned.

### **PRESENTATION OF FINAL PRODUCT**

After students have invested so much time, energy, and effort into this project, they must be able to present their films to an audience of their peers and/or parents. We will hold a documentary film festival and invite other classes to view their work. Movie posters in the hall will entice students to attend the screenings which will be held in the library on a large screen using the computer and a projector. Parents will also be invited to attend these programs. While the films should speak for themselves, students will have the chance to address the audience regarding their work and receive the accolades they deserve for their efforts.

### **ALTERNATIVE SUBJECT MATTER**

Although this unit was written for Language Arts, research and technology skills could easily transfer to other disciplines social studies and science. While the subject matter may be different, the emphasis on using photographs and film as resources and producing a visual product can be easily applied to a variety of topics.

### **Language Arts Applications**

My unit focuses on people who have performed service for others, but this subject may not be as relevant in other schools. However, the unit plan is also applicable to other areas, specifically the novels that teachers include in their curriculum, both core novels and those used for book clubs. One example is *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson. This story follows a young woman who is forced, for economic reasons, to abandon the family farm in 1843 in order to move to Lowell, Massachusetts and work in a textile mill. The novel examines the social and economic problems of the 1800s during the Industrial Revolution, the issue of child labor, and the need for the workers to organize and establish labor unions. Using this novel as a base, students could

examine this particular industry (textile mills) in depth: how textiles were produced prior to machines; how machines changed the mill environment, especially working conditions; and how child labor and low-wage labor continue in our time. Additionally, scenes depicting the situation could be derived from the text of the novel just as they are from the biographies from the service unit. When you examine the core novels in both middle and high school, it is apparent that books like *Grapes of Wrath*, *The Great Gatsby*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and many others really lend themselves to a documentary project.

### **Social Studies Applications**

Additionally, the unit could be applied to a Social Studies class. The basis for the documentary could be an era, a particular event, a historical figure, or a movement. The only difference is that students would have the choice of reading a published novel that pertains to the subject or creating their own historical fiction to illustrate the issue. For example, one historical topic could be the effects of civil conflict on family. Titles that could lend a personal point of view might include *My Brother Sam Is Dead* (American Revolution), *Across Five Aprils* (Civil War), or “The Sniper” (the Irish question).

### **Science Applications**

In a lesson plan entitled “Using Photography to Help Save the Oceans,” the staff of National Geographic suggests using photographs to help students “understand the impact they [humans] are having on the ocean by looking at the photography of David Doubilet.” The plans in this article could easily be extended to include a student film to effect a positive change in student attitudes toward many issues in science, from saving endangered species to conserving the oceans.

## **TECHNOLOGY ISSUES**

This project requires the extensive use of technology and, therefore, training for the students to be effective users of cameras and computers. While many students probably have home access to cameras, most do not have training in filming and editing. Consequently, technology training must also be considered in this unit. For this reason, when groups are formed within each class, it would be useful to distribute the “technology trained” among the “technology challenged.” None of the suggested programs or procedures are really difficult, and students are quick learners; technology should not present a major problem.

Scanners and computers are basic to this project. Students will either scan pictures into the computer or film them with a digital video camera for use in the movie. They may also capture footage from the Internet or from another videotape for incorporation into their film. Computers will be available for research and additional photographs.

The docudrama group will actually film and edit their depiction using *iMovie* in much the same way that a professional film is made. The era of filming “one camera, one time, from the front” is over; students may now use two (or more) cameras, film scenes several times, and edit sections into a cohesive and professional film with special effects, sound effects, transitions and so forth. For example, there are a multitude of sound effects available on the Internet; searching for and capturing a gunshot, for example, is easy for students. In fact, so many options are available that students must designate the type of gun needed for the shot.

Students must also address the music issue if they want to use a soundtrack in addition to narration. In the *Ten Boom* movie, for example, students may want to use music from that era as background for the narrative. They will be encouraged to compose and produce their own music whenever possible; however, many songs are available and free to download from the Internet. Incorporating and editing music into film is fairly simple using *iMovie*.

### **Mini-Lessons in Technology**

While I have many students who are confident in their use of technology, I also have students who can do little more than word-processing. Because I want all students to develop a level of competence in each aspect of production, I have planned mini-lessons for each piece of equipment and/or software we will be using; at a minimum, I want a core group of students in each of my classes to train on DVD cameras, scanners, and *iMovie*. After the core group is trained, they will be responsible for training other students in the class.

In some schools, a viable solution for technology concerns would be to involve the computer teachers and/or librarians in the process; for example, scanning may already be a part of the basic curriculum in computer science, or classes could be scheduled into the computer room in order to learn a specific activity (scanning, for example).

### **Alternative Technology**

While this particular unit requires the use of DVD cameras for filming and *iMovie* (or a similar PC application such as MovieMaker) for editing, some teachers may not have this equipment and software available on a regular basis; however, this project can be executed with/without the named equipment. One alternative is to construct a power point presentation. Even this alternative can vary based on the level of technology in a school. First, students may import photographs from the Internet or from a scanned book for use in the presentation. Second, many digital cameras have a “short film” function; the short films may be imported into a power point presentation. I have students who have used these short segments in a “silent movie” format to produce a very effective program. Another alternative is to have students produce a web page. Finally, students could construct a “picture” book of photographs that depict the three aspects of the issue that this project requires. Regardless of the medium, the integrity of purpose – representing issues visually – can be maintained.

### **DOCUMENTATION OF SOURCES**

Documentation of sources for this project is required, just as they are for papers or other projects. They will be presented as credits at the end of the film. Students will use the MLA system with which they are already familiar as they use it in other classes, and it is well documented in the grammar reference manual that all students are required to have.

### **IMPLEMENTATION ATMOSPHERE**

This unit requires that the teacher truly assumes the position of facilitator. Once the students understand the project and groups are formed, they must assume responsibility for the project. The teacher must be available for questions, to guide the groups to effective decision making processes, to provide materials as needed, and to insure that the schedule is met. Students must understand and accept the fact that they are a production company, a cohesive group of individuals with a common goal, and that in this unit, the process and product are both important.

### **LESSONS IN SCREENWRITING**

The following lesson plans focus on the screenwriting lessons for this unit. Writing the voice-overs and the script for the docudrama are significant tasks that need to be completed prior to actually filming the segments. These lessons involve all three groups in order to establish and maintain a clear focus and purpose for this project.

## **Lesson One**

“What was the story about?” I think all teachers have asked this question after completing a short story or a novel only to have students recount detail after detail about the events in the story without providing a real sense of what the story was about; details often obscure the more important aspects of a story such as conflict, theme, setting, and characterization. Summarizing a story is somewhat difficult for students because they don’t know how to edit the details in order to provide a succinct recounting of major ideas in the story. After my class has reached a consensus on the subject of their documentary, the docudrama group must revisit the biography or autobiography they read in order to create a screenplay (script) that will effectively depict the subject and his/her service in a condensed form; that is, they must depict a “slice of life” for the person, not every detail contained in the book. Because each class will be working on a different subject, I want the screenplay lesson to focus on a neutral work – one with which students are familiar. For that reason, I chose *Diary of a Young Girl*, the Anne Frank story, to demonstrate scriptwriting. Her journal entries are relatively short and easily translated into skits. Additionally, many scripts are available for this work that can be used as samples for the students.

### ***Materials***

Poster board

*Diary of a Young Girl* (5 copies)

### ***Objective***

Our first objective is to determine what should be included in the docudrama to illustrate a slice of life for the subject. The biography that the students have read is of considerable length, and they must construct, from all the information they have, a relatively short screenplay that will represent the qualities and characteristics of the person so that the audience will have a clear understanding of the choices the subject made and the challenges he/she faced in pursuing those choices. Again, I am using *The Diary of Young Girl* because most students know Anne’s story even if they have not read her journal.

### ***Activity One***

I have found that students in middle school have acquired a general background of the Holocaust and are able to piece together information such as the yellow stars, the identification cards, the fact that non-Jews sheltered people, the brutality of the SS, and so forth. I have also found it helpful to have students brainstorm information in order to jog each other’s memories for additional information. Therefore, I will begin class by asking students to brainstorm what they already know about Anne Frank, the Nazi movement, and the situation in Europe as it affected the Jewish population. One student will act as a scribe and record the ideas on the blackboard. If students seem to falter for information, I will suggest areas for discussion by asking questions. Who was with the Frank family in the annex? Who protected the family from detection? How did the family acquire necessities such as food? How did Anne, a teenager, adjust to life in the annex? Asking questions will assist students in recounting a more complete record of events in the annex.

### ***Activity Two***

Once students have a sense of the journal, I will ask them to consider making a short film that depicts one aspect of Anne Frank’s life based on a journal entries and what they know or have heard about her situation. Students will be divided into groups and asked to develop a *treatment* of the subject. That is, they must write a simple version of the episode that can later be translated into an actual script for the movie. According to Lanier and Nichols, “This is a continuation of the brainstorming process in which you get the bare bones of the story on paper. In simple

language, tell the story of your movie” (14). Kyker and Curchy also emphasize the importance of spending time on the treatment. “This treatment should serve as your compass throughout your production and postproduction. Don’t discard it when shooting begins. Continue to review and revise the treatment as needed so that your program will maintain its singular focus and achieve its objectives” (86).

In the case of Anne Frank, students must decide what they want to present about her story. Anne’s life did not begin in the annex; her family had a relatively normal life (at least by standards of the time) prior to evading arrest by the Nazis; should this part of her life be depicted, or should the story start while the family is in the annex? Which part of the story should receive emphasis – the early days in the annex or later, when the situation becomes even tenser? Which aspect of the story should receive the major focus – the problems any teenager would face under the duress of this situation or the changes that the Frank protectors or rescuers took, endangering their own lives and those of their families? In the end, what is the message that you want to send to your audience?

### ***Evaluation***

After students have completed their treatments, each group will record their ideas on a poster and present and defend them to the class. After a group makes its presentation, the other groups will have the opportunity to critique each treatment, particularly evaluating whether or not the message was clear from the plan. My goal is that students will realize the importance of establishing a purpose for their docudrama and understand that they must be selective about what they want to include. I hope they will also recognize that bits and pieces of the story may come from several parts of the book, but they must be combined into a cohesive series of events (the story) that will impact the audience in a particular way. During the discussion, I expect students to gain a *sense of the selectivity* that is required to honestly depict a character’s life in a relatively brief docudrama. After this activity, students should be able to revisit their own subjects in order to write a treatment for their chosen topic.

### **Lesson Two**

#### ***Materials***

*Diary of A Young Girl*: journal entries for June 24, June 30, July 3, July 8, and July 9

*Diary of Anne Frank*: excerpts from the movie script that correspond with journal entries

*Diary of Anne Frank* Video: excerpts from the movie that correspond with the journal entries and the movie script.

#### ***Objective***

The primary objective of this lesson is to prepare a screenplay for the docudrama based on the biography students read. Students will learn the essential differences between writing a story and screenplay including elements of stage direction, setting description, and format.

#### ***Activity One***

In order for students to become familiar with the screenplay format as opposed to prose/story-telling format, they will examine entries from Anne Frank’s diary and then compare those entries to the screenplay that was written for those entries. Since they have already created treatments for this book, I will use their treatments to demonstrate the differences between the journal and ultimate depiction on screen. I want students to especially notice that narrative is not used in the screenplay – that information must be revealed visually or through dialogue. For purposes of explaining this lesson, I will use the diary entry where Ann and her family decide they must leave their home and seek protection in the Annex.

In her diary, Ann describes the actions and emotions of the family when they receive a notice that her father is to be called up and questioned by Nazi authorities. As expected, they “see the writing on the wall” and plan an immediate escape. Anne’s narrative of this segment is quite vivid and an excellent section of the book to translate to film. Journal entries include the notice, the final packing without suitcases, transportation to the annex, and entry into the secret rooms. Students will again be divided into groups, and each group will be asked to closely read the diary entries and write a skit that includes essential actions from the diary entries. Because students are familiar with skits, they have an idea of how to begin. The new element that they must include will be stage directions. Typically, students depend on a narrator to explain what is happening on stage; this time, they will not be allowed a narrator but will have to add stage directions. Stage directions include characters, position on stage, movement, setting, and props. Students will have the rest of the period to complete the assignment. I have four computers in my room; the student scribe will type the script directly into the computer. At the end of the period, we will print copies for each member of the group. Their homework will be to read the script and note problems they need to resolve and changes they would like to make. Note: If computers are not available, the scribe will handwrite the skit, and the teacher may copy them so that they will be available for the next activity.

### ***Activity Two***

On the second day of this lesson, students will have fifteen minutes at the beginning of class to review their work from the previous day using their copies of scripts. The purpose is to make last minute changes or corrections to the dialogue to insure that they have been included. After their review, each group will present their skit to the class; I will instruct the audience to listen carefully to each presentation and note what they consider strengths and weaknesses, keeping in mind the similarities and differences with their own renditions of the actions.

Following each presentation, the class will comment upon the dialogue – for clarity, completeness, and the overall effectiveness of the skit. At this point, students should realize they cannot include every detail that Anne included and that they may have to construct or make-up dialogue.

### ***Activity Three***

Finally, on the third day, students will have a chance to see what professional screen writers did with their section of Anne’s story, for students will read the screenplay that corresponds with the scenes involved. Following the reading, students will compare the actual movie script with the journal entries, highlighting the journal material that was included in the movie in order to discover how much was or was not included in the film and the types of modifications that were made. Finally, students will view the section of film that corresponds to the journal entries they have been using. After the film students will review the basic facts about re-creation versus docudrama that were explained at the beginning of the project. Discussion will center around what was included (or not included) and why the screenwriters may have made those choice, the creation of the settings that were depicted, and the use of props.

### ***Activity Four***

After this introduction to script writing, the docudrama group will begin working on the script for their subject while the other groups (pre- and post-docudrama) will focus on researching photographs and films that may be used to introduce the issues and suggest the follow-up for the issues that are the focus of the documentary. Groups one and three will order the images and write voice-overs for their sections.

The docudrama groups will develop a script, designate the characters that are to be involved, and describe the setting in detail (including the props) and incorporate all of these elements into a screenplay; they will have three class periods for this task.

### ***Activity Five***

After the screenplay has been completed, the entire class will reconvene for a formal reading of the script. Each group will designate a scribe who will record suggestions from the audience. First, the pre-docudrama groups will make their presentation; as they display a photo or film sequence, a narrator will perform the voice over. After their presentation, the audience will note areas of concern - clarity, order, script changes, and so forth. Next, the docudrama group will perform a reading of their script; one student will be designated the reader for stage directions and the actors will actually follow those directions. The audience will critique the screenplay, and the scribe will record their suggestions on a copy of the script. Finally, the post-docudrama group will read through their script as images are shown to the class, and suggestions will be recorded. After all groups have performed, the students will have one class period to consider the suggestions and make changes. At the end of this activity, each group will have a workable script, and all students will be aware of the content so that the pre- and post- sections will appropriately lead in and out of the docudrama.

### ***Evaluation***

All three sections, events leading to the docudrama, the docudrama itself, and events that occurred after the docudrama will be bound into four notebooks: one for the teacher and one for each group. The groups will use these books to continue production of the documentary. However, the books must continue to be considered as works in progress as changes may still be appropriate during shooting and post-production.

### **Lesson Three**

#### ***Materials***

Script for the docudrama created by students.  
White board/markers for creating storyboard.  
Reduced copies of photos that will be used for the pre and post material.  
Film clips, with times that will be used for pre and post material.

#### ***Objective***

The objective for this lesson is that students will create a storyboard for their docudrama. The purpose of the storyboard is to visually divide the script into descriptions of shots that will actually drive the film-making portion of this project. The entire class must be involved in this lesson because all three sections of the documentary will require storyboards. While some filmmakers deny the need for this exercise, I have found that storyboards serve a variety of purposes: they determine who will be in each shot; they highlight the setting that will be used (including props, whether the shot is indoors or out, which backdrop will be used); and they indicate the dialogue that will accompany the shot.

#### ***Activity One***

Using the docudrama script, students will determine how many and what types of shots will be required for the scene(s) and record their decisions on white board (or blackboards). The board represents a rough draft of the final storyboard. Typically, a docudrama will include at least three scenes; the docudrama group will be divided into scene groups, allowing each group to work on one scene. Additionally, each research group will work on their own storyboards since they have, by now, gathered photographs and film clips necessary for their portions of the documentary. The initial storyboards will take two days to construct.

### ***Activity Two***

On the third day of this lesson, students will review the rough drafts of the storyboards and conduct a read-through of their work. The docudrama group will actually rehearse their lines and positions while the pre and post groups will read their voice-over test as they point to a picture. They must also time the voice overs and record those times on the storyboard. Once each group determines that their initial storyboards are accurate, they must transfer their storyboards to paper.

### ***Activity Three***

Using the paper storyboards, each group will analyze their portions and determine a shooting schedule for their material. The docudrama group must also record requirements for each shoot on the story board including place, costumes, props, backdrops, and so forth. This information will be copied and turned over to the setting/props group, the costume group, and the filming group for further work. Once students have completed this activity, they are ready to go into full production of the documentary.

### ***Evaluation***

The effectiveness of the story boards will be tested during film and post-production. They will be posted in the classroom to record progress each day. Again, these storyboard are “works in progress” and may be modified as needed during production.

## **CONCLUSION**

Many of the first documentaries were made purely for entertainment or artistry and were filmed during the era of silent film. However, the addition of sound to film and the Depression changed the course of documentary film makers.

During the 1920s explorers, journalists, artists, and others had experimented with the moving image in a spirit that was usually zestful and optimistic. Their films had seldom been contentious. But economic collapse brought tension and strife. Ideological combat began to dominate all media. Documentary film acquiring the spoken word at this precise moment was inevitable called on to join the battle. In the documentary field, the word-film became an instrument of struggle. (Barnouw 81)

The unit I have designed does require extensive planning and research in order to be successful. Some might question whether the process and product, a nine-minute documentary, are worth the time and effort. However, I firmly believe that this project provides a real world experience and opportunities for students to develop their reading, writing, group interaction, performance and technology skills. It also offers students the opportunity to follow in the steps of even the first documentarians as they learn about and reveal to others some of the most pressing social issues in our history and in our present.

Nichols clearly sees the documentary as a useful tool in dealing with social issues:

Documentaries lend us the ability to see timely issues in need of attention, literally. We see (cinematic) vies of the world. These views put before us social issues and current events, recurring problems and possible solutions. The bond between documentary and the historical world is deep and profound. Documentary adds a new dimension to popular memory and social history. (2)



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<<http://www.learnnc.org/articles/print/fugem1>>.  
This article is extremely useful as it details the guidelines for students and teachers when using copyrighted works in a multimedia presentation. This is one of the few articles I have found that specifies number of minutes, % of original work that can be used as well as where/how often the presentation may be shown without copyright infringement.
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- Bernard, Sheila Curran. *Documentary Storytelling for Video and Filmmakers*. Boston: Focal Press, 2004.  
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- Frank, Anne. *Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Doubleday, 1952.
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While the focus of this book is for teachers who are implementing a television station in their schools, the section of producing videotape programs would be directly applicable to the implementation of this unit. It include subjects such as storyboarding, planning the shoot, different types of editing, and titles and graphics.
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- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Picador, 1977.  
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<<http://www.learnnc.org/articles/print/vlphoto0602-1>>.  
This article guides teachers to assist students in understanding photographic images by using specific questions, picture captions, and/or additional research for specific pictures.

### Other Resources for Teachers

- “150 Years of Photojournalism.” *Time Magazine* Fall 1989.  
The entire issue of this magazine is devoted to news photos from 1839 until 1989. I used this magazine to show sample photos that could actually be used to illustrate some of the biographical causes the students were studying in the biography unit. For example, there were pictures depicting child labor, Nazi concentration camps, peace marches, and so forth. We also discussed writing “voice overs” for the pictures.

- “The Best Magazine Photography of the Year.” *Life Magazine* Spring 1999.  
The entire issue of the magazine is devoted to photography awards for the year, highlighting the photographers with a short biography for each and samples of their work. The pictures may be used to demonstrate the impact documentary photos may have on people; students noted characteristics that they would look for in their search for photos. Warning: Some of the photos are graphic and not suitable for all ages. Note: Life has annual issues that may be used.
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Maysles is known for his videos of people as they go about their lives. This unit plan outlines activities for students to produce their own reality films. PBS offers many materials in the plan that teachers can order for use in this unit.
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This volume deals with the nuts and bolts and includes many lessons that can be copied and given directly to students. It covers topics such as lighting, camera angles, and types of shots. The information is basic to producing good photos or films.
- “Interactive Storyboard Exercise.” March 23, 2006. <[http://www.fugazi.net/plugin/film\\_school/interactive.html](http://www.fugazi.net/plugin/film_school/interactive.html)>.  
This site, “plugincinema.com” actually offers students a chance to create a storyboard based on pictures from its site. Further, the site reorders the pictures for a second story. The site demonstrates to students how a story may change based on the order you choose for the images. While the site would be perfect for younger students, all students would understand the point from this fairly short exercise.
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- “Scripting the Past: Exploring Women’s History Through Film.” March 8, 2006.  
<[http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=254](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=254)>.  
This article describes the steps that students need to take in researching a particular person and her time period in order to recreate a “fictionalized” scene from her life and/or times. The described project is considerably shorter than mine and does not include the pre- and post-documentaries.
- Zahavi, Gerald. “Readings and Practicum in Historical Film and Video Documentary Production.” March 8, 2006.  
<<http://www.albany.edu/faculty/gz580/histdocfilms>>.  
This source is actually the syllabus for Professor Zahavi’s course at University at Albany-SUNY. The syllabus contains a plethora of sources that children may use for their research of photography, but the actual document is not developmentally appropriate for most students; rather the teacher needs to examine some of the sites before recommending them. Additionally, Dr. Zahavi’s syllabus provides an outline of documentary filmmaking that would be useful to teachers.