

CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT

Teacher-to-Teacher Curriculum Resources

California Writing



Family and Community History Projects

Jin Dorst, Teacher Consultant
Bay Area Writing Project, UC Berkeley

California Writing is a statewide program of the California Writing Project.

This yearlong project begins with students examining their own experiences, extends to exploring the lives of their families, and reaches beyond to include learning about their community. It focuses on strengthening students' identities—by affirming them and their lives—and the connections that bind and link family and communities.

Genres: poetry, memoirs, letters, reflective essays, biographies, autobiographical sketches, and narratives

Recommended Grades: 2-5

Overview

We live in a diverse society, and our students come from all kinds of families and cultural backgrounds, have a wide variety of life experiences, and speak a number of different languages. When they come into our classrooms, it's up to us to make them feel welcome and safe. It's essential that all students feel proud of their heritage and their culture so that they all feel they belong. Appreciating and validating all students takes some careful thinking, planning, time, and effort. It doesn't happen automatically. Students need to be taught how to get along, how to live with and appreciate people who may be very different than they are, but also are the same in many ways.

All students need validation and confirmation of who they are and where they come from, but this is especially important for students of color and for those whose first language may or may not be English or standard English. These students usually go to schools where their teachers are most likely white and the curriculum often does not reflect their experiences or backgrounds. The students and their lives, because they are such rich resources for learning, became the impetus for this yearlong project. It is a layered curriculum project that starts at a simple level and grows in complexity as the year goes on.

This journey of affirmation begins with the students in the class. We learn about ourselves and each other through weekly sharing of special childhood possessions, family artifacts, and family stories. The sharing leads to a variety of writing opportunities—poetry, memoir, autobiographical sketches, and personal narratives. We also read and study memoirs and biographies in our literature circles, analyzing the characteristics of the genres and drawing on what we read as models for writing.

Over the course of the school year, our learning and preparation for the family and community history projects covers seven important stages:

- Learning about myself and my friends: writing autobiographical sketches and memoir writing
- Learning about our families: exploring family experiences through writing and reading
- Learning about our grandparents: preparing for biography writing
- Learning about our parents: writing biographies

- Learning about our ancestors: researching family history
- Learning about immigration through the stories of immigrants: writing biographies
- Celebrating and going public: writing a performance script.

The year concludes with a deeper understanding and appreciation for the lives we all have and the places we have come from. This is accomplished through the power of purposeful writing that transforms, empowers, and inspires all of us.

Objectives

Students will:

- gain understanding and appreciation for all classmates through learning about others, their families, and their heritage
- feel safe and valued for who they are and where they come from
- learn to write their stories in various genres, including poetry, memoir, autobiographical sketches, biography, and narratives
- realize that they all have stories to tell and that their stories, though different, often have common threads and themes
- build community and establish positive relationships with all students and their parents or guardians
- connect their home and school lives
- publish their writing in a variety of ways and share them with others.
- understand the power of the written word and the impact it can have on their lives.

Applications to the California English-Language Arts Academic Content Standards

□ Second/Third Grade

Writing Strategies

- 1.0 Students write clear and coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea. Their writing shows they consider the audience and purpose. Students progress through the stages of the writing process (e.g., prewriting, drafting, revising, editing successive versions).

Organization and Focus

- 1.1 Group related ideas and maintain a consistent focus.

Penmanship

- 1.2 Create readable documents with legible handwriting.

Research

- 1.3 Understand the purposes of various reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, atlas).

Evaluation and Revision

1.4 Revise original drafts to improve sequence and provide more descriptive detail.

❑ Second Grade

Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

2.0 Students write compositions that describe and explain familiar objects, events, and experiences. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the drafting, research, and organizational strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

Using the writing strategies of grade two outlined in Writing Standard 1.0, students:

- 2.1 Write brief narratives based on their experiences:
 - a. Move through a logical sequence of events.
 - b. Describe the setting, characters, objects, and events in detail.
- 2.2 Write a friendly letter complete with the date, salutation, body, closing, and signature

❑ Third Grade

Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

2.0 Students write compositions that describe and explain familiar objects, events, and experiences. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the drafting, research, and organizational strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

Using the writing strategies of grade three outlined in Writing Standard 1.0, students:

- 2.1 Write narratives:
 - a. Provide a context within which an action takes place.
 - b. Include well-chosen details to develop the plot.
 - c. Provide insight into why the selected incident is memorable.
- 2.2 Write descriptions that use concrete sensory details to present and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences.
- 2.3 Write personal and formal letters, thank-you notes, and invitations:
 - a. Show awareness of the knowledge and interests of the audience and establish a purpose and context.
 - b. Include the date, proper salutation, body, closing, and signature.

Teaching Sequence

❑ Stage One - Learning about myself and my friends: memoir writing

- Tell students they are going to learn about themselves and each other through the sharing of special items from home. To have a place to store the items for this yearlong project, they will create a "memory box" as a homework assignment. Give them about a week to complete the homework that follows.
- While students are completing this homework project, students are also reading memoirs and discussing the elements of memoir. Examples of what they discover about memoirs are:

- A memoir is about some part of a person life, not their whole life.
- It is specific and detailed.

- It should have something to teach others.
- It's a memory of some event in a person's life.
- It's a true story, but some of the dialogue or names of people could be changed.

This emerging understanding sets the stage for their writing of memoir.

- The teacher sends home a letter explaining the project and asking students to select an item for their memory box that was their favorite plaything when they were little, making sure they find out as much information about the item as possible if they don't remember.
- To create the memory box, students may use a shoe box or another box that is about the same size. The whole family may get involved to help make the memory box or it can be a project just for the students. Ask students to decorate their boxes any way they'd like using papers, photos, magazines, etc. to illuminate their personality.

Along with making the memory boxes, students also complete a questionnaire about the story of their birth and name:

NAME AND BIRTH STORIES

Dear Mom or Dad,

I need to find out the stories of my name and birth for school. Please help me answer the following questions:

1. How did I get my name?
2. How long did it take you to decide on a name for me?
3. What other names were you considering?
4. What other names did you call me when I was little?
5. Tell me about the time I was born?
6. What was I like when I was just born?
7. Who was at my birth?
8. Did you know I was going to be a boy/girl?
9. How big was I?
10. Did anything funny or unusual happen when I was born?

- Students bring their boxes and the first item to school the following week and share their items in the class' sharing circle. After sharing, they begin to write their stories. There are two assignments:
 - Students write about their favorite childhood item, describing it with as many details as possible and using the five senses. Teachers can also teach students to use similes to help students write more descriptively. Students should also include how they acquired the item, how they interacted with it, and what the status of it is now. Students can write poetry or narratives.
 - Students write the story of how they got their name, how they were born, or a combination of the two. They use the information gathered from the name/birth questionnaire. The teacher reads examples of birth/name stories are read aloud, including one she wrote.
- Exploring memories using the memory box:

Each week, students bring in a different item for their memory boxes—

- Week 2: Students bring a photo or an item that reminds them of a special event.
 - Week 3: Students bring a photo or an item that reminds them of a favorite place.
 - Week 4: Students bring a photo or an item that reminds them of someone special.
The person must be someone the student remembers and has positive memories of.
- Each week the routine remains the same. Students have time to share their items from their memory boxes. They freewrite about their items and then begin to draft their writing, again in poetry or narratives, both of which are effective ways to develop autobiographical sketches. For each piece of writing, the teacher may focus on different aspects of narrative writing such as similes, dialogue, strong verbs, or on the traits of effective writing—voice, organization, grammar, punctuation, or sentence fluency.

Note: You may not have time for students to take each piece through more than one draft, but through exploring memoir writing about the different items for several weeks, the students' writing will improve as they gain more practice and knowledge about memoir. You will likely need to have a catch-up week for students to finish their work, so there should be no new sharing or new writing that week, just conferencing, writing, and revising time.

Student Sample

Katherine

My parents wanted my name to be easy because my last name is hard. My mom liked the name Sarah except my dad didn't want a name that ended in "a" because my last starts in an "a" so the names would blend together and it wouldn't sound good. Everyone thought I was going to be a boy because neither my mom nor dad has a sister. My dad liked the name "Timothy" even though I think it's perfectly horrible. I would have been Timothy if I were a boy. But when I was born, I turned out to be a girl so somehow they named me Kate. Even though my parents like the name Kate better than Katherine, they thought that I should be Katherine because almost every Kate you run into is named Katherine. I got the middle name Hale because it's my mom's maiden name so I turned out to be Kate Hale Apostolou.

By Kate

Teaching Sequence Continued

- **Stage Two - Learning about our families: exploring family memories through reading and writing**
- After students have finished their work for the first stage of the family history project, the teacher introduces the second stage through the reading *The Patchwork Quilt* by Valerie Flournoy or *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco. Both of these books focus on important family treasures or artifacts. This is the first signal that the second stage of the project will focus on collecting family items for their memory box.
 - The teacher should share a family treasure and its story and tell students that they will also be adding a family treasure to their memory box. But for this step, tell students

they can bring a picture of their family treasure/heirloom rather than the real item. If the concept of a “family treasure” seems too daunting, tell students to bring a picture of an item that’s “meaningful” to their family in some way. Using the same routine as before, students will share, freewrite, and then draft a piece about their family treasures. Parents can and should be invited to come speak about their family treasures.

- The following week, students are asked to bring in a favorite family recipe and a story about that recipe—where it came from, when the family makes this recipe, what interesting stories come with this recipe, etc. Parents are invited to make the recipes with or for the class. Students may create food poems, food stories, food riddles, jokes, and/or drawings to go with their recipes. All recipes and stories/drawings are put into a class recipe book to give to their families as a gift.
- At this point, the teacher leads a discussions and charts the students’ answers to the following questions:
 - What is a family?
 - What do all families have in common?
 - Who’s in your family?
 - What do all families share?
- Read several literature books on families, making sure to include diverse, non-traditional family structures, such as *Heather Has Two Moms* by Leslea Newman. As a math connection, students can create graphs about the families in the class, for example, a graph showing how many siblings each student has or how many people are in each student’s family.

□ Stage Three - Learning about our grandparents: preparing for biography writing

- Brainstorm questions students would like to know about their grandparents (or an older adult in their family if grandparents are not available). Discuss the differences between an OPEN question and a CLOSED question. An open question allows for more rich response, such as “What are some of the games or activities you liked to play with when you were a child?” as opposed to a closed question such as, “Did you play basketball when you were growing up?”
- Students develop lists of OPEN questions in small groups. Then the teacher charts the best questions from each group as determined by the members of the group. These questions will be the foundation for the interview questions in later stages of these projects.
- For homework, students are asked to write down their grandparent’s address on a stamped envelope and complete a family tree chart.
- During class time, the teacher models how to write a friendly letter, including the greeting, body, and salutation. Instruction also focuses on how students can embed the questions they developed in a letter to their grandparents.
- Students begin drafts of the letter to their grandparents, choosing just one grandparent to write to. When the teacher approves the letter, students make final corrections and rewrite the letter using a pen or Sharpie. The teacher mails the letters.

□ Stage Four - Learning about our parents: writing biographies

- While the students are waiting for their grandparent letters to pour in, the teacher begins to turn students' attention to the genre of biography. The teacher should collect and make available to students a variety of biographies from a wide range of reading levels and diverse subjects and authors (see recommended resources section).
- Students choose a biography to read independently, while the teacher reads aloud several biographies or excerpts of biographies over the course of two to three weeks. As students are immersed in the genre of biographies, they will answer the questions—“What makes a biography a biography?” and “What do you notice about biographies that we've been reading?” Chart and post a list of findings/discoveries about biographies. Add to this list as students learn more information about biographies from their reading and analysis.
- From my students:

What do we know about biographies?

- A biography is about someone's life.
- A biography can be told in chronological order or reverse chronological order or told as a flashback.
- Biographers use techniques such as jackdaws, flashbacks, and anecdotes to help others understand their characters.
- Biographers use dialogues and thoughts from the character as well as thoughts from others about the character to make his story more interesting.
- Just telling facts about a person is boring and makes the reader want to fall asleep.
- The best biographies have a theme that weave throughout the story.

- To prepare students to write biographies of their parents or guardians, the teacher asks the students to choose one person to write about and asks them how they would go about writing a biography. Questions the teacher may ask include—
 - How do you suppose these authors were able to write their biographies?
 - How do you think they went about collecting information for their books?
 - What techniques do authors use to write their biographies?
- The lesson on open vs. closed question also applies here, so students are reminded to ask open questions of their parents too. Students begin to formulate interview questions for their parents and make plans for how they will gather their research on their parents. Teacher may want to type up the questions brainstormed by the students or have students copy the questions from a chart. Students will want to add questions to the list that will personalize the interview for their parent.

Samples of Parent Interview Questions:

ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD

1. When were you born and where?
2. What was it like when you were growing up?
3. What kinds of things did you like to do when you were little?
4. How did you get your name?
5. What is your birth story?

ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

6. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
7. What were your parents like?
8. What kind of house did you live in?
9. Do you have a special memory about your family that you could share?

ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS

10. Who were your best friends when you were little?
11. What kinds of things did you do with them?
12. Do you have a funny or sad story to tell me about you and your friends?

ABOUT NOW

13. How did you meet dad/mom?
14. What was your greatest accomplishment?
15. What are your hobbies and talents?
16. Where do you work or what do you do?

- The teacher models an interview with another adult by interviewing a friend or even her own parent in front of the class. Teacher demonstrates how to take notes for the interview, writing only the key words, not every word in the sentence. Another option students have is to video or audiotape the interviews and transcribe the notes at a later time. This will take more preparation before the interview and more teaching after it so that students can turn video or audiotaped information into notes.
- The teacher sends a letter to parents (see additional resources), describing this interview project and offering suggestions for different ways for the student to conduct the interview (such as asking only a limited number of questions at a time and/or breaking it up over 2 to 4 days). Over a two-week period, students will conduct interviews of their parents at home, take notes, and bring the notes to class on or before the due date. Note: The younger the students, the more guidance they will need in conducting this interview.
- Teacher shows students how to use a graphic organizer to organize the information collected from and about their parents. Then, once the graphic organizer is filled in, the teacher explains how to use the information on it to organize and write paragraphs. Students write a first draft of the biography using their notes and graphic organizers.
- Students use a biography rubric to see where they may need to do some more work (see assessment section). The rubric is developed with the students after the study of biographies, taken from the charts about what they had discovered or noticed about biographies and what elements make up a biography.
- Students read their drafts to each other and get feedback. Students write a second draft, which the teacher reads, offering more feedback where necessary.
- Students revise and edit their work and write a final draft.
- Teacher approves the final draft and sends it to be word processed for publication by volunteers or instructional aides.
- Students draw portraits of their parents to accompany the biography.
- Going public:
We invite the families to a Biography Breakfast in our class where the students read their writing aloud. The biographies are collected and bound into an anthology that students take home for their family's enjoyment.

Student Sample

Scott Apostolou

On August 15, 1960 a ferry boat was traveling across the Puget Sound from Seattle to Bainbridge Island in Washington. Resting on a table was a box with a new born baby boy named Scott inside. Scott was Barbara Julian Apostolou's first baby.

About a year later, another baby boy named Jeff was born. When Scott was little, he said, "Jeff's an old broke baby. Let's throw him in the garbage can and get a new one."

Scott and his family lived in a house on a dock. Scott and Jeff used to throw toys out the window, into the water to see how long it would take for them to wash back up to shore. Jeff threw dish towels out the window. "You can always buy more." He said.

Scott and his family also had two black Labrador retrievers name Mattie and Charlie. Later on Scott also got a female cat named Walter Cronkite. Walter won an award at a cat show for the most unusual name.

When Scott was six, he moved from the house on a dock to another house nearby. Scott and Jeff used to build snake traps in the backyard. Supposedly, the snake would go through a tunnel and when the snake got out, a glass piece would fall and cut off his head. Jeff tricked Scott by putting snakes in the trap that were already dead and saying the trap had worked.

When Scott was seven, he moved to Seattle. That was the year Jeff got hit by a car. He was in the hospital for two months and had to wear a body cast. That was also the year Scott's parents got divorced. It was a very upsetting time.

Another unforgettable event in Scott's life was when he was in middle school while on a fieldtrip. It was the day before Thanksgiving and his side started to hurt. He held his side and was groaning, but no one seemed to notice. Scott was a troublemaker so when he went back to his class, his teacher didn't believe him. After school, there was an assembly with a really bad Native American comedian. He said, "Why were the Indians there first?" "Because they had reservations." He kept repeating that line over and over. When Scott got home, he climbed in bed. His mom had been fired that day and was grouchy when she got home and saw that Scott had not taken out the garbage. Jeff said, "I think he's really sick." Scott went to the hospital and got his appendix taken out just in time before it burst. Scott ate Jello for Thanksgiving that year.

When he was about 14, Scott's mother announced, "I am marrying Jack in two weeks. We're moving to Germany." So Scott's mom married Jack Gibry in two weeks and they all moved to Baumholder, Germany. There were lots of soldiers in Baumholder and since soldiers had nothing to do, they got drunk and fought on October 31st. It was pay day for the soldiers, and that's when they got drunk. So Halloween was on October 30th instead of October 31st. Two years later, Scott moved to Heidelberg, Germany and had his high school graduation in The Heidelberg Castle. Scott went to college for two years at Mount St. Mary's College. For the last two years, he went to the University of Virginia and studied English. When Scott was 26, he lived next door to Christy Hale in New York. Liz, Scott's old girlfriend knew Christy's apartment mate and introduced Scott to Christy. Four years later, they got married on August 31, 1991. Four years after that on May 3, 1995, Christy gave birth to a baby girl name Kate. Now Kate is 8 1/2 years old and Scott does graphic design and Kate thinks he's a wonderful father.

By Kate

Teaching Sequence Continued

□ Stage Five - Learning about our ancestors: researching family history

Note: Letters from grandparents streamed in one by one as students were knee deep in the biography study. Most of the grandparents wrote back right away, eager to tell their stories. Their letters were often written in different languages and were always wonderful. It was nice to read that the grandparents appreciated being asked about their lives. Parents helped by calling grandparents who could not write back and interviewing them over the phone.

The letters from grandparents were always highly anticipated in our class. Whenever a letter arrived, we would read it, sometimes immediately. Some letters were lengthy, so we only read a couple of pages and/or some highlights. Some grandparents even sent pictures and/or copies of old documents, like their immigration papers.

- As letters arrive, ask students to begin to note important information such as what country or state the family has come from and why they came to the United States or California. Students write their names on index cards to hang on a world map that is posted on the bulletin board. String or yarn connects the index cards to the locations on the map where the students' families/ancestors have come from. Everyone learns we all come from many places, from almost every continent.

Note: Students discover their heritage through these letters from their grandparents, if they didn't already know. As we mapped the places around the world that our letter writers came from, we also noted on the same map the places where other family ancestors had come from. This was not so easy for a few students who had quite a diverse background.

We also took the opportunity to invite parents in to share family stories. One parent shared the work she had been conducting on her family's genealogy, how she started the search process for her ancestors and why she wanted to do it. Families are rich resources at every stage of this project.

□ Stage Six - Learning about immigration through the stories of different immigrants: intensive biography writing

Note: It is a natural flow to move into our next unit on Immigration in this project after learning about our ancestors. We learn that everyone comes from somewhere. Some of us are new immigrants, some come when they are younger, some are born here, but their parents are immigrants, or their grandparents or great-grand parents are. The fact is we all come from somewhere. We begin by reading lots of literature on immigration, both fiction and nonfiction. I read aloud a few selected books and the students also have a trunk filled with books they read during literature circles and Silent Sustained Reading time. As the stories unfold from the literature books, I share my own personal immigration story with the students.

- Once everyone is familiar with immigration and has learned where every classmate has come from, the teacher asks, "Why did your families/ancestor come to the United States?" and "Why do people still come or want to come over here today?"
- After students make speculations, the teacher tells them they will be meeting four different immigrants in the next two weeks, so we can learn about their immigration story.

Note: I invited a diverse group of people from all over the world to share their immigration experiences. It's interesting for the students to bring in other staff members from your school or people in the community.

- To prepare students for the interviews, the teacher leads students in brainstorming questions they could use to learn about the immigrant's experience in coming to the United States. Chart and post questions.

Samples of Student Generated Immigrant Interview Questions:

COMING TO AMERICA

1. What is your name?
2. Did your name get changed when you came to the U.S.?
If so, why and what was your name before?
3. What country did you emigrate from?
4. Why did you immigrate to America?
5. When and how did you immigrate to America?
6. Did you come alone or with someone else?
7. What kind of visa did you have? Was it hard to get this visa?

THE BEGINNING

8. Did you know any English when you came to the U.S.?
If not, how did you learn and how long did it take you?
9. Did you experience any prejudice? How?
10. What was it like when you first came? Who did you stay with?
11. What was it like to learn a new language and a new culture?
Do you have any funny or sad story about this?
12. How did people treat you in America when you came?

YOUR OLD COUNTRY

13. What is it like in your old country?
14. What is life like here compared to your old country?
15. What do you miss about your old country?

WHAT ABOUT NOW?

16. How is your life now?
17. Do you like it better here in the U.S. or in your old country?
18. How do people treat you now?
19. What do you do or where do your work?
20. Is all of your family in the U.S.?
21. Do you go back to visit your old country? How often?

- One by one the immigrants come to visit and teach, and students ask the questions they have developed, as well as others that occur during the interview. The teacher models taking notes on another chart while facilitating the interviews.
- After the final interview, the teacher posts all the notes taken from all four interviews. The teacher chooses one of immigrant's interview notes and models how to do an outline. Remind students that they can use a web or another graphic organizer instead if those tools are more useful to them when organizing a lot of information.
- From the outline, teacher models writing up the immigrant's story in the first person point of view (as if they were the immigrant telling the story) while students watch. Teacher discusses the variety of ways to start a story, using examples from literature.
- Students now choose one of the immigrants to write about and using the notes from that person's interview, complete an outline or a graphic organizer. Students then practice writing a draft of the immigrant's story in first person—again, as if they are the immigrant telling the story.
- After this guided practice, students are ready to choose their own immigrant to interview and write about. They may choose a family member or a family friend. They must choose someone who is willing to share their story since some people are more

private or reserved. The teacher explains to students that sometimes people have painful stories attached to their immigration, so they may not feel comfortable sharing. Students may need their family's help in finding someone who is willing to talk candidly.

- The teacher sends home a letter describing this immigrant interview assignment (see additional resources). Students have two and a half weeks to complete this assignment. They are only interviewing and taking notes, and again, using a tape recorder or video camera is an option. Having had the experience of interviewing their parents before makes this task easier.
- After all students turn in their notes from the immigrant interviews, the teacher asks students to organize their notes in the way that works for them—outline or graphic organizer.
- The teacher asks students what components they think should be included in the immigration story, and collaboratively they develop a rubric (see assessment section). Students use the rubric to check their initial work. Some realize they need to gather more information, so they go back and interview their immigrant in greater depth. Some have a lot of information but have to delete some details that are not crucial to the immigration story.
- Students write a draft and the teacher reads it and meets with the students, using the following questions to guide a response and revision conference:
 - Is it written in the first person?
 - Does it make sense?
 - Is there enough information?
 - Do I still have questions?
 - Is the story interestingly written?
- Students write a second draft, using the teacher's feedback and making sure spelling, punctuation, and grammar are correct.
- Going public:
 - The stories are word processed by a team of parents who type them up at home. Students bring pictures of their interviewee if they can and display them with their published stories on the bulletin board in the class.
 - As an art connection, students can make puppets of their interviewee, using tag boards, yarn, and a variety of fabrics. The goal is to make sure their interviewee's clothes match the traditional clothing of their country of origin and that their appearance is accurate. Pictures of students with their immigrant puppets are also displayed with the immigration stories on the bulletin board.
 - While students are busy working on their immigration stories at school, they also have a homework assignment to do at home, with or without their family's help. They are to do research on the country of origin of their interviewee. Students have a choice of process and product for this homework.
 - Students present their country research project to the class when they are finished.

Student Sample

Two Worlds in One Life

When I was born I was named Nouanechanh, meaning "smooth moon". I was born in Laos. In Laos there are no refrigerators, telephones, TVs, computers or cars and we slept on the floor. My 10 sisters and 5 brothers lived with our parents and grandparents. We knew everyone in our village and were good friends with them.

One terrible day when I was 22, a war started in Vietnam. I took a canoe over to Thailand and from there I flew to America. All my siblings were in refugee camps. My mom had died, and my father was too old to come to America.

On the plane, everyone was so excited to come to America because it's a free country. We were also excited to eat the ham sandwiches they served on the plane.

In Laos we didn't have sandwiches. We also didn't have any dairy. The food was very spicy. We ate a lot of fruit and vegetables. But we never ate sandwiches.

In America there was lots of unfamiliar food. One of them was cheese. At first I didn't like it but now it's one of my favorite foods.

Meanwhile, I was also getting used to school at Seattle Community College.

After school, I babysat the next-door neighbor's child. On the weekends I worked as a waitress. After I finished school I worked as a secretary for a real estate company.

All the while I was learning English at ESL classes. I didn't get directly discriminated, but felt a little discriminated because it was hard for me to speak English.

In Laos we spoke Laos and French because Laos is a French colony. Now I speak English most of the time. I still have trouble writing, but I'm getting better all the time.

I changed my name from Nouanechanh to Nouane. I live in California with my husband and kids. I love America but I still miss the ways in Laos where we could visit our neighbors whenever we wanted without even calling them.

By Kate

Teaching Sequence Continued

□ **Stage Eight - Final culminating project and going public**

- Combining the students' ancestor information with excerpts taken from the students' immigration stories, the teacher and students write a script to tell the whole story of immigration. A repeated line may be "We are a nation of immigrants. We all come from somewhere."
- Invitations to the students' performance are sent home to families and to the immigrants the students interviewed.

Note: Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

- Students wear solid colors to the performance to represent the many colors of our nation. They line up facing front, forming an open arc, and take a step forward when they say their lines. Lines are spoken in unison, alone, and/or in small groups.
- The performance concludes with an international potluck feast.

Note: I taught these Family and Community History Projects to my 2nd/3rd grade students. Everyone was impressed by the depth and breadth of the project. Students not only learned to understand and value the diversity in our class, but they grew tremendously as writers. The stories of the people— from parents, to grandparents, to immigrants— will not be forgotten. Working on a yearlong project— comprised of projects and stages that built one on the other and made up a coherent whole— was very meaningful and rewarding. Students were directly engaged in this yearlong process because the curriculum was about them. They learned the power of their story and how we are all shaped by our experiences, and how we are linked as human beings.

Recommended Instructional Resources

Memoirs

- Angelou, Maya. *My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken And Me*. New York, NY: Clarkson Potter Inc., 1994.
- Bahr, Mary. *The Memory Box*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Co., 1992.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House On Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.
- Clifford, Eth. *The Remembering Box*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985.
- Curtis, Jamie Lee. *When I Was Little*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- DePaola, Tomie. *The Art Lesson*. New York: The Trumpet Club, 1989.
- Fox, Mem. *Wilford Gordon McDonald Partridge*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 1985.
- Gottlieb, Dale. *My Stories By Hildy Calpurnia Rose*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991.
- Willner-Pardo, Gina. *What I'll Remember When I'm A Grownup*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
- Yee, Sylvia and Kokin, Lisa. *Got Me A Story To Tell*. San Francisco: St. Johns Educational Threshold Center, 1977.

Name Stories

- Ada, Alma Flor. *My Name Is Maria Isabel*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1993.
- Choi, Yangsook. *The Naming Jar*. New York: Dell Dragonfly Books, 2001.
- Henkes, Kevin. *Chrysanthemum*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1991.
- Lester, Helen. *A Porcupine Named Fluffy*. New York: The Trumpet Club, 1986.
- Yamate, Sandra S. *Ashok By Any Other Name*. Chicago: Polychrome, 1992

Birth Stories

- Curtis, Jamie Lee. *Tell Me Again About The Night I Was Born*. New York: Joanna Cotler Books (An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers), 1996.
- Kroll, Virginia. *Beginnings-How Families Come To Be*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman, 1994.
- Martin Jr., Bill and John Archambault. *Knots On A Counting Rope*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987.
- Mora, Pat. *Pablo's Tree*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.

Recommended Instructional Resources Continued

Families

- Garza, Carmen Lomas. *Family Pictures*. Berkeley, CA: Children's Book Press, 1990.
- Gray, Libba Moore. *My Mama Had A Dancing Heart*. New York: Orchard Books, 1995.
- Newman, Leslea. *Heather Had Two Mommies*. Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1989.
- Reich, Hanns. *Children And Their Fathers*. New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1962.
- Rylant, Cynthia. *The Relatives Came*. New York: Scholastic, 1985. (also memoir)
- Seuling, Barbra. *What Kind Of Family Is This?* New York: Random House Children's Books, 1985.
- Simon, Norma. *All Kinds Of Families*. Niles, IL: Albert Whitman and Company, 1976.

Family Treasure/Heirloom

- Polacco, Patricia. *The Keeping Quilt*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.
- Rogers, Paul. *From Me To You*. New York: Orchard Books, 1987.

Biography

- Adler, D. *A Picture Book Of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Holiday House, 1990.
- Bains, R. *Harriet Tubman: The Road To Freedom*. Mahwah, NJ: Troll, 1982.
- DeKay, J.T. *Meet Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Random House Children's Books, 2001.
- DePaola, Tomie. *26 Fairmount Avenue*. New York: Scholastics, 1999.
- DePaola, Tomie. *Tom*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1993.
- Fritz, Jean. *The Double Life Of Pocahontas*. New York: Puffin Books, 1987.
- Towle, W. *The Real McCoy: The Life Of An African American*. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
- Zhensun, Z. and Low, A. *A Young Painter: The Life And Paintings Of Wang Yani – China's Extraordinary Young Artist*. New York: Scholastic, 1991.

Grandparents

- Hooker, Ruth. *At Grandma And Grandpa's House*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Company, 1986.
- MacLachlan, Patricia. *Through Grandpa's Eyes*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980.
- Williams, Barbara. *Kevin's Grandma*. New York: Dutton, 1978.

Recommended Instructional Resources Continued

Heritage/Ancestors

- Echewa, T. Obinkaram. *The Ancestor Tree*. New York: Lodestar Books, 1994.
- Holman, Sandy Lynne. *We All Have A Heritage* (The Culture Co-op). Bolton, United Kingdom: Cricket Books, 2002.

Immigration

- Aiki. *Painted Words, Spoken Memories*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1998.
- Batherman, Muriel. *Before Columbus*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981.
- Freedman, Russell. *Immigrant Kids*. New York: Scholastic, 1980.
- Knight, Margy Burns. *Who Belongs Here*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House Publishers, 1993.
- Maestro, Betsy. *Coming To America*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.
- McGovern, Ann. *If You Sailed On The Mayflower In 1620*. New York: Scholastic, 1969.
- Munsch, Robert. *From Far Away*. Toronto, Canada: Annick Press, 1995.
- Sandin, Joan. *The Long Way To A New Land*. New York: HarperCollins, 1981.
- Say, Allen. *El Chino*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.
- Shea, Pegi Deitz. *The Whispering Cloth*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 1995.
- Yin. *Coolies*. New York: Philomel Books, 2001.

Teacher Resources

- Ada, Alma Flor. *Authors In The Classroom*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004.
- Buss, Kathleen and Lee, Karnowski. *Reading And Writing Literary Genres*. Newark, DE: IRA, 2000.
- Stone, Richard. *Stories: The Family Legacy – A Guide For Recollection And Sharing*. Maitland, FL: The Storywork Institute Press, 1996.
- Winston, Linda. *Using Family Stories In Elementary Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.

About the Teacher Consultant

Jin Dorst is a National Board Certified Teacher who coaches new teachers in the Palo Alto Unified School District in Palo Alto, California. Besides providing support to new teachers on a one-to-one basis, she also provides staff development for the district's teachers as well. Prior to becoming a coach, she was a classroom teacher for 14 years. She is also a teacher consultant with the Bay Area Writing Project.

Assessment

RUBRIC FOR BIOGRAPHY

Use the numbers below to rate yourself in each of the items listed.

Add up all the numbers at the end to give you a total score.

1--weak, needs improvement, 2--ok, adequate, 3--strong, excellent

- My biography has an interesting title. _____
- I have a well organized biography that tells the story of my character in a logical order (not necessarily in chronological order.) _____
- I've used dialogue in my story. _____
- There's a theme in my biography. _____
- There's action in my biography. _____
- I've described my character in great detail. _____
- I've included thoughts of others about my character in my biography. _____
- I've included some of my character's thoughts. _____
- I've used special techniques such as flashbacks, anecdotes, and/or jackdaws in my story. _____
- My biography has an interesting lead that hooks the reader in. _____
- My biography has a strong ending that makes sense. _____
- I've corrected my spelling and punctuation. _____

28-36: **Excellent**

20-27: **Great job.** (Find one or two ways to improve your writing.)

Less than 19: **Needs work** (Find some ways to improve your writing. See teacher if you need help.)

RUBRIC FOR IMMIGRATION STORY

1--weak, needs improvement, 2--ok, adequate, 3--strong, excellent

- I've written my immigrant's story in the first person point of view. _____
- My immigration story has an interesting title. _____
- My story has a logical flow that makes sense. _____
- The reader knows my immigrant's name, country of origin, when and why he/she immigrated to the U.S. _____
- I've included some anecdotes about my immigrant's struggles or experience when he/she first came to the U.S. _____
- I've described what my immigrant's life is like now compared to his/her life back in the old country. _____
- I've included some details about my immigrant's country of origin. _____
- My story evokes an emotional response from my reader. _____
- I have a strong lead and a good ending. _____
- I've corrected my spelling and punctuation. _____

Add up all the points.

10-16: Needs improvement. Go back and rework your piece.

17-24: Great job. See if you can find one or two ways to improve your work.

25-30: Excellent! You are ready to publish.

Additional Resources

☐ Letters to parents describing the interviewing projects— of parents and an immigrant.

Dear Parents,

As you know, our class has been reading and studying biographies. Students are now ready to write their own biographies. Each student will choose one of his/her parents to interview and write a biography of that parent. You will find a list of questions attached to this letter. The students brainstormed in groups to come up with questions they wanted to ask you. We then took the questions and organized them into the categories you see attached. Students are not limited to the questions here if they want to ask more.

To conduct this interview, you and your child should decide on a time that is good for both of you, preferably when there is no distractions around. You may choose to do the interview in a number of ways suggested below or you may have your own idea that works best for you. Your child has TWO WEEKS to complete this homework.

OPTIONS FOR INTERVIEWING:

1. Have your child interview you one section at a time so that you spread out the interview in four different sittings.
2. Do two/three questions a day.
3. Do half of the interview at a time.
4. Skip around the questions and do the ones that suit your mood or the time frame you have. (You don't need to do them in order.)

Students have to take notes on the interview, but they know that they do not need to write out all the words, only the key words to help them remember the answers.

(If your child needs help with writing the notes, it's ok to help. Be sure to print clearly so they can read it later.)

Have fun with your child and enjoy the process together!

Sincerely,

Jin Dorst

Dear Parents,

It's time for our students to find and interview an immigrant as part of our study on immigration. As you know, we have been conducting interviews in our classroom so students are familiar with the process. They also have prior experience with interviewing you when we did the biography unit. This homework assignment is similar to the one they did when they interviewed you. First they have to decide on an immigrant they want to interview. They can choose a family member of someone outside the family. This person should be someone who is willing to share his/her story of immigration without hesitation. Your child will learn more from a person who is willing to share openly than someone who is reserved or only willing to share the happy part of his/her immigration story.

The questions for the interview are attached. These are questions generated by our class which we have used with all the guest immigrants. Students are not limited to these questions. They should feel free to add more or change some. It may be helpful to video or audio tape the interview to transcribe later. If they are taking notes while interviewing, they will need extra time for writing. It's ok to help with the note taking, but students have to be able to read it later.

As with the parent interviews, it's up to you and your child to decide how best to execute this interview, but it is probably not a good idea to try to do the whole interview in one sitting due to the amount of note taking for your child unless you video or audio tape the interview.

You have two weeks to complete this assignment. Students must turn in their notes on or before April 4th so we can begin writing the first draft at school.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Jin Dorst

❑ Name and Birth Stories

Dear Mom or Dad,

I need to find out the stories of my name and birth for school. Please help me answer the following questions:

1. How did I get my name?
2. How long did it take you to decide on a name for me?
3. What other names were you considering?
4. What other names did you call me when I was little?
5. Tell me about the time I was born?
6. What was I like when I was just born?
7. Who was at my birth?
8. Did you know I was going to be a boy/girl?
9. How big was I?
10. Did anything funny or unusual happen when I was born?

❑ **Directions for making an expandable scrapbook.**

DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING AN EXPANDABLE SCRAPBOOK

Materials:

Construction papers

Tagboard or something comparable

Cardboard

(Papers, tagboard and cardboard should be the same size)

Rubber band

Popsicle stick, wooden dowel or twig

1. Choose about 12 sheets construction paper (any color).
2. Cut the tagboard, the same size to use as a cover.
3. Use the cardboard (same size as the cover) for the back cover, but tagboard is fine too if cardboard is not available.
4. Use a double hole puncher to punch holes in all the papers, including front and back covers. A single hole punch may also be used, but make sure all the holes line up perfectly.
5. Line up all the papers and the covers (front and back), making sure the holes all match, string one end of the rubber band through one hole of all the papers and covers.
6. Take the rubber band that you've threaded through the one hole of all the papers and covers and put it through one end of the popsicle stick.
7. Take the other end of the rubber band and do the same as above so that now both ends of the rubber band are threaded through the holes of all the papers and covers and warp around the ends of the popsicle stick.
8. The scrapbook is held together by the simple rubber band and stick. The pages can be easily taken apart to add or delete.
9. Let students decorate the cover they have a personalized scrapbook to hold all their writings.