

Stories of Self Unit Plan



In an ideal world, I'd teach the Stories of Self curriculum over at least a three-week unit, with a full week or more devoted to exploring stories of self that are not the college essay, workshoping write-alikes, and facilitating student-led classroom dialogues about identity and selfhood. Only then would we even begin to talk about the college essay as a particular genre of story of self, and we'd have two weeks to fully "do" the prewriting process, analyze sample essays, practice workshoping drafts, and engage in retrofitting and reflective "flex" elements. In my dream, the Story of Self workshop is a holistic, multifaceted exploration of selfhood that includes writing in a multitude of genres and a lot of really meaningful, rigorous reflective and dialogic practice. The college essay is just the official justification -- the "what." Affirming ownership of one's identity, history, and experience is the deeper "why."

Since I know that very few of us have that luxury, however, here's a suggested unit plan outline for a much more condensed workshop -- 8 total lessons of about 45 minutes to an hour long each. The unit can be condensed even further to 5 or 6 lessons (see Notes for Teachers), or expanded easily to 10 or more. I hope that this is a helpful jumping-off point for figuring out how the workshop might fit into your larger curriculum and schedule! I welcome all questions, feedback and suggestions at sarah.ropp@gmail.com.

Lesson 1

Curriculum Elements

- **0.0** Anticipation Guide
- **0.1** Introduction to the Workshop
- **1.0** Intro to Stories of Self
- **1.1** Analysis of Stories of Self

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Explain what a "story of self" is.
- Identify the purpose and format of a college admissions essay.
- Analyze a story of self according to the details and images that create tone related to an identified aspect of selfhood.

Activities

- Complete anticipation guide as “do now.” Discuss.
- Read intro to the curriculum, focusing on “What Is This?” and “What Is the College Essay?”
- Read Intro to Stage 1, Stories of Self.
- Model analyzing 1st story of self (included in Intro: Brilliant Imperfection).
- Analyze 2nd story of self together (recommended: “Afro-Latina”).
- Analyze 3rd story of self solo or in pairs (students’ choice; there are 14 total available on website to explore).

Homework for Next Time

- Pick two more stories of self from the website to analyze on your own.

Notes for Teachers

I like to point out to students that Eli Clare has so many other aspects of selfhood that he might have written about (for example, his region of origin, his gender, his sexual identity, his age), but focused on his disability and his love of nature -- a story of self is not an autobiography, it's a portrait.

Definitely play the video of Elizabeth Acevedo performing “Afro-Latina” as well as giving students the text -- it's electrifying.

Lesson 2

Curriculum Elements

- 1.0 Intro to Stories of Self
- 1.1 Write-alikes of Stories of Self

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Reflect critically on defining experiences, personality traits, and values
- Write a story of self “write-alike” that mimics one of the examples provided

Activities

- Get feedback from students about what stories of self they explored as HW, which ones resonated particularly with them and why, etc.
- Introduce the concept of a Write-Alike (in Intro to Stage 1).
- Use “Where I’m From” poems as a model (read original, then read a couple of write-alikes, including your own).
- Have students write “Where I’m From” poems and share.

Homework for Next Time

Pick two more stories of self and complete write-alikes for them (you can do them based on the stories of self you analyzed for homework last time, or choose new ones).

Notes for Teachers

Student samples of “Where I’m From” poem write-alikes are linked within the curriculum. You can also listen to George Ella Lyon read the original and share write-alikes by Eric Johnson (video) and Willie Perdomo (written). And write and share your own, too!

I like to ask students to select a few lines from their poems that they particularly like and share them out to the class without context. Focus on affirmation.

Lesson 3

Curriculum Elements

- 2.0 Intro to Stage 2
- 2.1 Who Am I?
- 2.2 How Did I Get That Way?
- 2.3 What Stories Do I Have to Tell?
- 2.4 What Story Do I Want to Tell?

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Identify 3-5 defining personal qualities, passions, or values
- Connect qualities, passions, or values to defining experiences
- Describe a moment from a defining experience in an unstructured freewrite
- Select a story to tell based on critical reflection and outline major elements of an essay

Activities

- Share out from additional write-alikes completed as homework. Affirm and celebrate.
- Read Intro to Stage 2.
- Lead students through Steps 1-4 of prewriting and planning process. Student samples of each stage are linked within the curriculum to use as models.
- For each step, present instructions, share a model or two, and then give students time to complete that step on their own. Then move on to next step. You will probably get through Steps 1 and 2 and at least one freewrite.

Homework for Next Time

Complete Stage 2. Complete Step 3 with additional free writes first. Then complete step 4 (selecting and outlining your story).

Notes for Teachers

Again, it is really powerful if you complete these exercises as well and share them with students. You don't have to pretend to be back in high school; you can reflect on your life right now (the better to emphasize this process as one that has meaning and relevance beyond the college essay).

Lesson 4

Curriculum Elements

- 3.0 Intro to Draft 1
- 3.1 Draft 1

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Write a first draft of a college admissions personal narrative essay

Activities

- Discuss the prewriting experience. How are students feeling about their chosen story and plan?
- Read Intro to Draft 1.
- Take the rest of the session as writing time for students to work on Draft 1.

Homework for Next Time

Finish your first draft, if you didn't finish it in class.

Notes for Teachers

If you have fewer in-person meetings to devote to the essay workshop, you could assign students to write their first drafts at home, as well.

Do read the Intro to Stage 3/Draft 1, though, including the ice sculpting video!

Lesson 5

Curriculum Elements

- 4.0 Intro to Reshaping Draft 1
- 4.1 Reshaping Draft 1

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Explain the difference between “macro” and “micro” revision
- Analyze an essay draft for structure, organization, and content
- Create a plan for revision

Activities

- Share out one line from your first draft that you really love, without context. Snaps.
- Read Intro to Stage 4 together.
- Complete Steps 1–4 of Reshaping Draft 1, following instructions for doing by yourself or with a review partner. Refer to sample work linked in curriculum for help.

Homework for Next Time

Complete your revision plan and reshape Draft 1 into Draft 2.

Notes for Teachers

Note that the curriculum has options for completing this stage alone or with a review partner. If you can, a peer review in class is ideal. If you have less time, it also be done as HW (including the peer review).

It is helpful to model Step 2. Use linked student samples or a story of self.

If you have more time, you could extend the lesson by spending one session completing the Reshaping document for a sample essay before students do it for their own in the next.

Lesson 6

Curriculum Elements

- 5.0 Intro to Refining to the Final Draft
- 5.1 Refining to the Final Draft

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Explain the difference between “macro” and “micro” revision
- Analyze an essay draft for style, mechanics, and tone

Activities

- Check in regarding how people are feeling about their essays.
- Complete Round 1 of Refining to the Final Draft (solo or as peer review).
- Complete Round 2.

Homework for Next Time

Repeat Rounds 1 & 2 on your own to produce your Final Draft.

Notes for Teachers

For check-ins: consider an interactive presentation/polling tool like Mentimeter that generates a visual map of responses anonymously and in real time. A great way to get a quick read on a group.

If you have no more class time to devote to the essay, make sure students are aware of the Flex elements in the curriculum (Retrofitting, Journey to College video, and sample essays) for future reference on their own.

Lesson 7

Curriculum Elements

- **Flex:** Retrofitting Your Essay

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Explain what retrofitting an essay means. Define application system
- Analyze a prompt according to key words and main ideas
- Adapt drafted narrative to a prompt, using analysis
- Analyze redundancy, relevance, and contextual information on a sentence and paragraph level to adjust word count up or down

Activities

- Warm up: What is “retrofitting”? Where have you heard this term before, or what do you think it might mean?
- Read Retrofitting Guide (up to “How Do You Break Down a Prompt?”).
- Model breaking down a prompt using Apply Texas prompts. Then practice breaking down a new prompt selected from Common App prompts.
- Model adapting a draft to a prompt, using student samples linked in curriculum.
- Model adjusting for word count, using examples linked in curriculum. Provide a paragraph and have students practice several rounds of cutting or adding words.

Homework for Next Time

Refer to the Retrofitting Guide as needed to help you understand prompts, adapt your essay to a new prompt, and/or adjust the word count of your essay.

Notes for Teachers

If students are seniors preparing to apply very soon, they can do all of this “for real” based on the colleges they’ve chosen to apply to and the application systems associated with them. If they are juniors, they can practice these exercises using linked sample final drafts.

The Retrofitting Guide contains embedded examples as well as links to student work. You could use 1-2 student samples to demonstrate, and then use a sample final draft as the basis for students to practice adapting to a prompt and adjusting word count.

Lesson 8

Curriculum Elements

- **Flex:** Journey to College video

Objectives Students Will Be Able To:

- Reflect on current feelings and doubts related to college in writing and through dialogue

Activities

- Use the questions of Part I: Before Watching on the document as a warm up/do now
- Introduce the video. Watch and complete Part II: While You're Watching. You might want to watch twice once while referring to the transcript, a second time while completing the notes.
- Complete Part III: After Watching. Expand into a student-led dialogue/Socratic seminar, if you have time.

Homework for Next Time

Refer to the Retrofitting Guide as needed to help you understand prompts, adapt your essay to a new prompt, and/or adjust the word count of your essay.

Notes for Teachers

This activity can be done at home for homework, or it can be done in the same lesson as the introduction to the Retrofitting Guide. If you have the time to devote to it, however, it is a wonderful opportunity to simply let students talk out their fears and hopes together.