MY P.O.V: Nothing but the Truth
A Study of Narrative Non-Fiction
Christy Kingham, 11th Grade ELA
TYWLS, Astoria

MY POV: Unit Overview

Unit Summary: Through a study of narrative non-fiction, students will re-explore the tools writers use to effectively transact with a reader. Students will then transfer these skills to their own narrative non-fiction writing—culminating in the college essay. By considering the college essays as a strong piece of narrative non-fiction, students will have a chance for their honesty, creativity and personal philosophies to emerge in this work and beyond.

Outcomes/Transfer: Communicate, Be Precise, Create, Plan, Innovate, Collaborate, Discern, Argue.

CCS Standards Linked to Outcomes on shared google doc

Essential Questions:
- What is narrative non-fiction?
- How can we read like a writer?
- How can we use the qualities of narrative non-fiction to write creative, effective, honest college essays?
- What is an effective college essay, anyway?
- What is the “so what” in writing? How can we be sure to have a “so what”?
- What does personal narrative reveal about a time-period? (subtext-context, social studies connection)

Enduring Understandings:
- Non-fiction writers often utilizes the tools of creative writing associated with fiction
- Non-fiction can be a creative, engaging genre
- We can become better writers by studying authors of that genre
- Reading like a writer is a particular skill that can be learned and that has the potential to raise the quality of our writing
- College essays reveal 2 important things: who you are as a writer, and who you are as a person
- Our writing can improve substantially through revision and feedback

Products:
Beginning:
- NARRATIVE NON-FICTION SCRAPBOOK: choice of delivery (online in person etc...) analysis/collection of Narrative non-fiction characteristics and model pieces, excerpts from shorts and full length texts that are examples of “good” writing (discern, argue, conclude, communicate)
- DISCUSSION: 4: 2 online and two in-class discussions about The Color Of Water (communicate, collaborate, discern)
- PLANNING: observed planning- is on task

Middle:
- RESUME: Final resumes due-drafts already completed (be precise)
- PLANNING: observed planning- is on task
- THIS I BELIEVE ESSAY: Submit to NPR (communicate, be precise, create)
**PLANNING PROCESS PORTFOLIO Check**: Writing process collection: Including short response free-writes, life map, name monologue, drafts of essays, and peer review— with annotation *(plan)*

**End**

- **COLLEGE ESSAY(s) and drafts** (communicate, be precise, create, plan, innovate)
- **EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE ESSAY Draft** *("the one I am not sure I can send but is modeled after one that I love")*(create)
- **PLANNING PROCESS PORTFOLIO**: Writing process collection: Including short response free-writes, life map, name monologue, drafts of essays, and peer review— with annotation *(plan)*
- **PLANNING**: observed planning—is on task and reflective

**Texts:**

**Analysis**
- Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction, Editor Judith Kitchen, W.W. Norton
- Ralph Fletcher *Writing My Life*
- Anne Lamott’s *Bird By Bird*

**Independent Texts:**
- Memoirs—reading a memoir independently as a mentor text

**Whole Class Text:**
- James McBride, *The Color of Water*

**Non-Fiction Excerpts, Authors, References, Essays, Memoirs etc:**
- Ned Vizzini: *Teen Anxt, Nahhh*
- Jack Gantos, *Hole in My Life*
- Excerpts from additional authors: David Foster Wallace, David Sedaris, Dave Barry, Erma Bombeck David Foster Wallace, Sedaris, Dave Barry, Erma Bombeck, Woody Allen, P.J. O'Rourke, Steve Martin, Behind the Beautiful Forevers, Dave Eggers, Augusten Boroughs, Jeanette Walls, Joan Dideon, John McPhee, Philip Lopate, Jumpah Lahiri, Sherman Alexie, James McBride, James Baldwin (see my website for specific texts)
- Philip Gourevich, *We Wish to Inform You*
- Michael Lewis, *Wading Toward Home*
- Amy Tan: *Mother Tongue*
- Sherman Alexie: *Superman*
- Michael Chabon, *The Secret Skin*

I start with a baseline, common understanding of what narrative non-fiction is and to have students practice looking for elements of good writing in this genre before giving out the scrapbook assignment.

- To start exploring the genre, read aloud Jay Z Decoded excerpt and Ned Vizzini “Nintendo Saved Me” vignette from *Teen Anxt*. Give out unit overview, Give out and start reading *The Color of Water*
- Start a working definition of narrative non-fiction— in journals and in a common space in the classroom, the narrative non-fiction scrapbook assignment and The Color of Water
- Planning procedure (state plans for the day/week at the start of class)


**Student Handout: Unit Introduction**
One of my favorite authors, David Sedaris, once said, "If I sit at my computer, determined to write a New Yorker story I won’t get beyond the first sentence. It’s better to put no pressure on it.” Pressure. That’s a word most people equate with 11th grade. One of the pressures is writing a college essay, your chance to express who you are in a short piece. This may feel overwhelming, but it doesn’t have to. The college essay is nothing more than a really well crafted piece of narrative non-fiction. So, what is narrative non-fiction, anyway?

The genre we are studying goes by many names: Narrative Non Fiction, Creative Non Fiction, Literary Non-Fiction. Whatever we name it, good writers use the qualities of good writing no matter the genre. Narrative non-fiction (the name we will use!) writers use the tools of what is traditionally called creative writing to tell true stories. By using the tools of creative writing, these writers are able to pull us in to their world.

For the next month or so, we will embark upon a new study of this genre. More specifically, we are looking at personal, auto-biographical stories. Writing about yourself creatively can feel like quite a challenge. So, why reinvent the wheel? Good writers always look to those who have come before them for inspiration. By first studying narrative non-fiction, we will come to our own decisions about what makes "good" narrative non-fiction. Then we will use these qualities in our own writing.

Throughout this unit you will read and you will write, write, write...this is a chance to dig in and consider your personal philosophies, a chance to remember the indelible moments of your life, a chance to make sense of the moments that define who you are.

A (very brief) Overview

The Beginning: A study of narrative non-fiction and reading The Color of Water by James McBride

The Middle: Brainstorming and writing our stories, including a new "This I Believe" finishing The Color of Water.

The End: (Mid-May) Polishing our College Essays

Outcomes you will "see" at least once: Create, Discern, Communicate, Collaborate, Be Precise, Argue, Plan, Innovate

More to come! Let’s get started!

Student Assignment: Narrative Non-Fiction Scrapbook
Narrative Non-Fiction Scrapbook Overview

In order to represent your working definition of narrative non-fiction, you will create a digital or physical “scrapbook” of excerpts from non-fiction pieces you are reading. You are looking for lines from the text that represent the characteristics of narrative non-fiction or are just plain good writing. What makes it look like a scrapbook is up to you!

Format:

Include:
- Your definition of narrative non-fiction, including the characteristics of “good writing” that appear in this genre
- Excerpts from at least FIVE different narrative non-fiction texts that help to represent the tools of writing you include in your definition of narrative non-fiction.

To Complete this you will need to...
- Read a selection of NEW narrative non-fiction pieces- choices on my website on our Narrative Non-Fiction Unit page
- Review pieces we have already read, you can include James Baldwin from Social Studies and our class text The Color of Water
- Decide on a format
- Revise your definition
- Find excerpts that work for you
- Ask a peer to review your work!

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<td>Shows a basic understanding of a text(s)</td>
<td>Examines the text closely, making inferences that express a sophisticated understanding of the text</td>
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<td>COMMUNICATE: Make ideas and information understood, mindful of audience, purpose, and setting.</td>
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<td>Attempts to effectively communicate ideas and conclusions.</td>
<td>Effectively communicates ideas and conclusions.</td>
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The Color of Water is a memoir written by James McBride. Not only will we use this text to study narrative non-fiction, but it also will connect to American History and the exploration of James Baldwin’s work that many of you have done in Greg’s class. You will read this text at your own pace with two reading discussion days as deadlines. Some of you may choose to make a schedule for yourselves, others may just prefer to read. You should use this text to help with your narrative non-fiction scrapbook, and as you read consider our essential questions:

- What does personal narrative reveal about a time-period?
- What is narrative non-fiction? And...

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- How can we read like a writer?

**Schedule:**

**Blog Post 1:** Essential Quotation (Due before discussion day)
**Reading Discussion Day 1:** Monday, April 29th (First half of book)

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<th><strong>COLLABORATE:</strong> Work effectively with others to achieve common goals.</th>
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<td>Fulfilled agenda tasks and group work and participated without detracting from the group dynamic.</td>
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<td>Embraced collaboration as an innovator, improviser and leader of the group.</td>
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**Blog Post 2:** Quotation and discussion question (Due before discussion day—chapters 12 to the end of the text)
**Reading Discussion Day 2:** Friday, May 10th (Second half of book)
Student Assignment: This I Believe

This fall, you completed a “This I Believe” Essay with the lens of “what it means to be American”. So many of you wanted to write an essay about a topic of your choice, what you TRULY believe in. Use the elements of narrative non-fiction that we have studied to help you write honestly and creatively!

To Complete this, you will need to:

▪ Visit my website This I Believe page for materials (in our Narrative Non-Fiction section)
▪ Read This I Believe essays (many!) to get a feel for the possibilities
▪ Review The format of This I Believe
▪ Complete at least ONE brainstorm from my web page
▪ Write at least ONE draft
▪ Write a final This I Believe, submit it online and share it with me on google docs by May 3rd

REMEMBER:

1. **It’s all about you** – Write about you and your thoughts. Tell us your story in the first person, and try to avoid sentences like “We feel this way.”

2. **Keep it personal** – Don’t try to use words or phrases you wouldn’t normally say. Remember, if you wouldn’t be comfortable saying the words out loud, it is probably too formal.

3. **Timing is everything** – Make sure that you read your finished essay out loud. It shouldn’t be more than three minutes long when read at a normal speaking rate.

4. **Say what you do believe**, not what you don’t – Write about what you think, but not at the expense of others. Keep the focus on you, and what you believe, not what you disagree with.

5. **Have fun!** How many times are you allowed to be 100% free with your choice of topic, and what you want to say about it? This is your chance to write about your personal philosophy of life, so don’t be shy–let it out!

**Rubric:**

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<th>Create: Produce or develop a product for expression.</th>
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<td>Your essay follows the structure of a this I believe essay. You clearly state a personal philosophy and support this belief using your personal story.</td>
<td>In addition to Meeting standards, your essay expresses a philosophy statement that leaves the reader thinking in a new way. You clearly utilize the qualities of narrative non-fiction to craft your essay.</td>
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**Be Precise:** Accurately represents solutions, ideas, and language.

Any errors in grammar and mechanics do not take away from the reading of your essay. You may attempt to use sophisticated vocabulary to express yourself.

You have no noticeable errors in grammar and mechanics and appropriately use sophisticated vocabulary to express yourself.

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**Student Assignment**

**Evidence and Deadline Overview**

**Evidence:**
- ✓ Narrative Non-Fiction Scrapbook
- ✓ The Color of Water Reading and Discussion
- ✓ This I Believe Essay
- ✓ Your POV: The College Essay
- ✓ Alternative Essay
- ✓ Planning Portfolio

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<td>Blog post 1</td>
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<td>30th</td>
<td>May 1st</td>
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<td>29th</td>
<td>Reading</td>
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<td>Reading Day 1</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Final Resume Due</td>
<td>This I Believe Due (Field Trip today- Submit online to me online!)</td>
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<td>Story to College Workshop: <em>outside group coming in to work on essays</em></td>
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<td>Small group writing workshop</td>
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