

TITLE OF LESSON

American Literature Unit 2 Lesson 2 – Autobiography
What does our language reveal about ourselves?

TIME ESTIMATE FOR THIS LESSON

One class period

ALIGNMENT WITH STANDARDS

California – Eng 11-12: R1.0-3, 2.0, 3.0-5, W1.0-5, 2.0-1, W/O1.0-2, L/S1.0, 1.4-8, 2.0, 2.2-3

MATERIALS

Reflective Circle Diagram – Student Page (2 copies per student)

Essay 1: Reflective Language – Student Page

Reflective Writing Rubric – Student Page

Mommy, What Does “Nigger” Mean? – Reading

NOTE: As with the previous unit, this unit will include readings containing language that may be offensive. Whenever you use readings such as this one, please review the discussion ground rules that you established with your class during the previous unit. For a review of suggested ground rules, see the *Teacher Pages* for American Literature Unit 1: “N” Word Discussion.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- To review the components of autobiographical writing
- To read *Mommy, What Does “Nigger” Mean?*
- To explain the components of a Reflective Essay
- To identify the components of reflective writing in the essays read in class
- To review the guidelines for Essay 1
- To transform a journal idea into a Reflective essay

FOCUS AND MOTIVATE STUDENTS – WARM-UP ACTIVITY

- 1) Homework Check – Stamp/initial complete journal entries.
- 2) **Daily Log** – Have students copy Daily Log below
- 3) **Sustained Silent Reading** – Read for ten minutes. After silent reading, ask for some volunteers to describe the author’s message in their novel. Share an example from your own novel as well.

Date	Journal	Lecture Discussion	Activity	Readings	Homework
		Reflective Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Autobiographical Writing Review 2. Gloria Naylor essay 3. Reflective Circle Diagram 4. Outline Essay 1: Reflective Autobiography (Step 1 of Guidelines) 	<p><i>Mommy, What Does “Nigger” Mean?</i></p> <p><i>Mother Tongue</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First draft of Essay 1: Reflective Language Essay (Step 2 of Guidelines) 2. Select and sketch an important image from your essay. 3. Define vocabulary words.

ACTIVITIES – INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP

1. Discussion Guidelines – Remind the students of the class ground rules for discussions involving potentially offensive language. These are the rules you established in the previous unit. For a review of suggested ground rules, see the *Teacher Pages* for American Literature Unit 1: “N” **Word Discussion**.
2. Autobiography Review – Ask for a volunteer to remind the class of the definition of autobiography. This is a form of writing that they have been using since freshman year. What are some of the components of autobiographical writing? Ask each group to brainstorm a list amongst themselves, then have someone from the group write the list on the board. They should be able to come up with some of these elements (and they should take notes on these once they have been listed):
 - Characters
 - Character Descriptions
 - Setting
 - Setting Description
 - Details
 - Conflict/Problem
 - Theme(s)
 - Use of first person
 - Dialogue
 - Show not tell
 - A single defining moment in the writer’s life
 - Reflection
 - Evaluation
3. Reflective Writing – Tell the students that this list includes important elements for writing about an autobiographical incident. Today, they are going to begin discussing a similar type of writing: Reflective. Although it is possible to write a reflective essay about incidents and events that did not happen to you personally, they are going to focus on how to transform the description of a personal incident into an essay about its larger meaning. They will read an example of a Reflective Essay now.
4. **Group Reading** – Distribute the reading, *Mommy What Does “Nigger” Mean?* to each student. Have them choose Group Roles (see below). Tell them to read the essay in their groups. They may decide upon a way to read it (take turns reading aloud, read to partners, read silently). While they read, they should find answer the following questions: What is the author’s message in this essay? How is it illustrated by the incident described? The illustrator should make a sketch of an image suggested by the essay – one that the group feels is important and is given sufficient details in the essay. (In future lessons, they will be working with Flash to communicate ideas with images and writing. Identifying and illustrating images in writing allows them to practice making connections between verbal and visual messages.) Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for this activity.
5. Present – When the time is up, call on each group in turn to present their answers to the questions about the essay, as well as the image. How did examples and images differ? Why were the images selected important to the readers? What was the underlying message of the text, and how did the incident help to describe it? (One key underlying message in this essay is that the power and meaning of a word changes according to the context in which it is spoken. This is a notion that should be familiar to the class, after the discussions from the previous unit.) Now tell them to return to their groups and discuss “Mother Tongue” for a few minutes. What was the underlying message of this essay and how did the autobiographical incidents help to illustrate it? After they have discussed it in groups for a few minutes, call on each group to say their ideas. (This essay also discusses the importance of context, and the idea that, since identity is tied to language, our identity shifts along with our language when we “code-switch.”)
6. Components of Reflective Writing – Ask the students what the last two essays read had in common. They should be able to identify that both essays do the following:
 - tell a story based on a significant personal experience
 - tell a story having to do with language
 - talk about a “big idea” that the personal experience helps to illustrate
 - analyze/interpret the idea and how it relates to the personal experience

These are the critical components that you want them to recognize: reflective writing explores a big idea, a larger truth (using an incident or information as a springboard). And reflective writing includes analysis, often from more than one perspective. Tell them that reflective writers can structure their essays in different ways, but they always include the above two components.

7. Diagram the Essay – Distribute the **Reflective Circle Diagram** and tell the students to look at it. Tell students they are going to identify the structural reflective essay components of the Gloria Naylor essay (see the **Reflective Circle Diagram**). While you discuss the components, draw and fill out a **Circle Diagram** on the board.
8. Identify Message – First, ask students how you should fill in the message circle. (Your circle should say something like “Naylor wants to tell us that the power and meaning of a word changes according to the context in which it is spoken”. The class may not have agreed on the message of the essay, or may have felt that there was more than one. Tell them that this is fine. However, they will have to justify whatever message they list when they use this diagram for other essays.)
9. Identify Main Incident – Next, ask the students to identify the main autobiographical incident that Naylor uses as a springboard for this message (her experience with her third grade classmate). Write this in the first Incident circle.
10. Supporting Details – For the boxes below, ask them to suggest two descriptive details about the incident (the difference in test scores, Naylor’s feelings of confusion upon hearing the word).
11. Alternative Structures – Then point out that the diagram can be filled out two different ways after this, depending on the structure of the essay. The author may build on the first incident by describing more incidents, or she may interpret the first incident from another perspective. Naylor does both. For example, Naylor describes other times she has heard the word “nigger,” so these are examples of more incidents. However, she also describes how the meaning of the word changes in the different contexts, so she is also interpreting the first experience different ways – interpreting the experience of hearing the word “nigger” in different contexts.
12. Second and Third Incidents – Ask for a student to sum up a second incident or interpretation, providing two descriptive details. Repeat with the third box.
13. Analyzing Main Incident (Body Paragraph 4) – Finally, call on someone to state the author’s interpretation of the first incident. Does the author restate the message in a new and different way? Ask someone to find a sentence where she does so. (This is a good example: “So there must have been dozens of times that the word “nigger” was spoken in front of me before I reached the third grade. But I didn’t “hear” it until it was said by a small pair of lips that had already learned it could be a way to humiliate me.”) Point out that every incident and every interpretation must reinforce the original message somehow.
14. Practice – Tell the students to bring out their *Mother Tongue* readings and use the **Reflective Circle Diagram** to identify all the reflective writing components. They may do so in groups, but everyone should fill out their own **Reflective Circle Diagram**. Tell them to pay attention to Tan’s structure, and whether or not it is different from Naylor’s.
15. Present – Call on groups to present their **Circle Diagrams**. Did Tan use the same structure as Naylor? How were they alike or different?
16. Guidelines for Essay 1 – Tell the students to bring out their journal entries from last night. Naturally, these journal entries are not yet true examples of reflective essays. Their task is to create such an essay, and they may use the journal entries to do so. Ask the students if the journal entries they wrote were about significant moments in their lives. Is there a message, a larger truth that they wish to expand upon, based on the experience of that incident? If this is not the case, they may wish to change the topic entirely. If they wish to change the topic, remind them that the essay must be about language; it is a reflection about an autobiographical incident that relates to language. They may want to write about their mother tongues, or about the experience of learning a second language. They may write about some of the ideas explored in the previous unit: how language is used to dis-empower people, as with the “Incident” poems. Even if their journal entry isn’t the springboard for the essay’s theme, they may still use some of what they wrote. Distribute the **Essay 1: Reflective Language** guidelines. Remind them that the structure may differ a little from the essays they are used to writing. Traditionally, in an essay introduction, they should include their main idea, 3 supporting ideas

they will cover, and a wrap up. In this one, they may choose to reveal their supporting details in later paragraphs, as Naylor does, rather than placing them in the introductory description of an incident.

17. **Goal Setting** – Distribute the **Reflective Writing Rubric**. Remind students of the goals they set after their last evaluation essay. They should have written specifically what they would work on to get the grades they have targeted. (It could have been that they need to work on turning their work in on time, writing second drafts, getting their papers edited properly, making sure to include 3 reasons that back up their thesis statements, or having at least 2 pieces of supporting evidence with quotes from the text. They should have chosen at least 2 specific things they could do to earn the grades they are shooting for.) Tell the students to think about these goals, as well as the **Reflective Writing Rubric** and the **Essay 1 Guidelines**. Remind students that the rubric is your assessment of the quality of their work. They will also be graded on their effort and the actual work they put into the drafting process, as seen in the GRADING PROCEDURE portion of the **Guidelines**.
 18. **Outline Essays** – Distribute another copy of the **Reflective Circle Diagram**. Tell the students to use this form to outline their essays. Remind them that the first thing they need to determine is the message of the essay. Then they should decide how to use the incident (or incidents) to illustrate and support the message. Incidents should be described with detail, and must be accompanied by analysis, either along with the description, or following it. If there is time, they may complete this outline in class. If not, they should do it for homework, then write the first drafts of their essays (Steps 1 and 2 of the **Guidelines**).
 19. **Review Homework** – In addition to writing the first draft of Essay 1, students should sketch an image suggested by their own essays. What is an important image in the essay? It should be important enough that it is given a detailed description. They should also begin a vocabulary list, titled Vocabulary List One, and define the words “context” and “inflection” in their own words, and giving examples from the essay the class reading that illustrate the meanings of the words.
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HOMEWORK

- 1) First draft of Essay 1: Reflective Autobiography
 - 2) Select and sketch an important image from your essay.
 - 3) Define vocabulary words.
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GROUP ROLES

Facilitator – Your job is to keep the group focused on the task at hand, to help identify reflective writing components and images in the essay, and to answer the questions. It is not your job to come up with the ideas. It is your job to encourage/help other group members to come up with the ideas.

Notetaker – Your job is to write the examples of reflective writing elements that the group identifies and the answer to the questions. It is not your job to generate all of the ideas. It is your job to help others to give you as many ideas as possible to write.

Presenter – Your job will be to help your group members to present the examples, the answer to the question, and the illustration. It is not your job to conduct the entire presentation. It is your job to make sure that everyone has a part in the presentation.

Illustrator – Your job is to illustrate the image that your group agrees is an important image in the essay. It is not your job to come up with all of the ideas for the illustration. It is your job to help your group members to generate and agree upon the ideas. Then you must sketch them.

DOCUMENTATION FOR PORTFOLIO

Unit 1

Project 1: A True Story
Evaluation Essay 1
Incident Poem

Unit 2

None

Essay 2
Essay 3: Satire
Final Project: Flash Dictionary Chapter
American Literature Unit 1 Final Exam