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Obstacles: The study of life's hurdles through reading and writing personal narratives [7th grade]

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Education Department

Understanding by Design Curriculum Units

Trinity University

Year 2006

Obstacles: The study of life's hurdles
through reading and writing personal
narratives

Nilima Patel
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UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

Unit Cover Page

Unit Title: Obstacles: The study of life's hurdles through reading and writing

Grade Level: 7th grade

Subject: English Language Arts

Designed By: Nilima Patel

Time Frame: 3 weeks/ daily 90 minute periods

School District: Fort Bend Independent School District

School: Sugar Land Middle School

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Brief Summary of Unit:

The study of writing and reading is all too often carried out separately. Students learn how to read and write in isolation; such learning proves to be limited. This unit aims to integrate these two studies into one. Students will study authors and the strategies they employ when writing. These strategies will then be applied in their own writing. Such strategies include developing characters and ideas, organizing ideas using the plot components, and cultivating writing through tone and mood.

Unit: Obstacles—The study of life’s hurdles through reading and writing
Grade: 7th grade ELA

Stage 1: Desired Results

Understandings

Students will understand that...

We read to discover and reflect on ideas and experiences of our own and the author’s.

We write to learn and reflect on ideas and experiences of our own.

We read to learn about good writing.

Effective readers use specific strategies to help them better understand the text.

Effective writers use specific strategies to develop their thoughts and ideas so that the reader feels that he or she is experiencing the story’s events.

Obstacles occur in life not in vain, but so that we may learn from them and draw from those experiences to better our own lives or the lives of others.

Essential Questions

How does what we read affect how we write?

How do we overcome obstacles/hurdles?

How do we write to reflect the hurdles we have experienced in life?

How do we properly convey these experiences through development?

How do we learn about ourselves through writing?

How do we learn about life and about others through reading?

Knowledge and Skills

The student will be able to:

...determine a text's main (or major) ideas and how those ideas are supported with details

...find similarities and differences across texts such as in treatment, scope, or organization

...offer observations, make connections, react, speculate, interpret, and raise questions in response to texts

...interpret text ideas through such varied means journal writing, discussion, enactment, and media

...support responses by referring to relevant aspects of text and his/her own experiences

...analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes they undergo

...recognize and analyze story plot, setting, and problem resolution

...analyze ways authors organize and present ideas such as through cause/effect, compare/contrast, inductively, deductively, or chronologically

...recognize how style, tone, and mood contribute to the effect of the text

...write to express, discover, record, develop, reflect on ideas, and to problem solve

...select and use voice and style appropriate to audience and purpose

...produce cohesive and coherent written texts by organizing ideas, using effective transitions, and choosing precise wording

...generate ideas and plans for writing by using prewriting strategies such as brainstorming, graphic organizers, notes, and logs

...apply criteria to evaluate writing

...respond in constructive ways to others' writings

...evaluate how well his/her own writing achieves its purposes

...analyze published examples as models for writing

...review a collection of written works to determine its strengths and weaknesses and to set goals as a writer

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Portfolio of Obstacles: The students will create a personal narrative portfolio that explores life’s hardships and struggles. This portfolio consists of two primary components, the first being a collection of student-created resources. As the students read about the struggles faced by others, they will study various skills and strategies employed by writers. The students will then create a resource kit to which they may refer as they complete the second component of the portfolio—the application of the skills. Through writing the students will explore a personal struggle that they have experienced in their lives, thus applying their new understanding of life’s obstacles and utilizing the strategies of the writing that they have studied. Prefacing this narrative will be an introduction that examines the meaning of hurdles in people’s lives. The essay will end with a reflection, probing the student’s writing, depth of thought, development of ideas, author’s craft, and areas of strengths and weaknesses after reading peer work.

Other evidence:

Checkpoint:	Skill:	Evidence:
Checkpoint 1	Plot	Somebody Wanted But So Chart Three-Column Notes “Wilma Unlimited” Plot Diagram
Checkpoint 2	Character Analysis	Peanuts Comic Strip Sequel “Raymond’s Run” story marked with characterization evidence “Raymond’s Run” Characterization Chart
Checkpoint 3	Style, Tone, Mood	“Passage to Freedom” and “Fighting Fire” Tone Chart Scene Drawings from “Fighting Fire” Explode the Moments paragraph (a modified form of Barry Lane’s strategy from <i>Reviser’s Toolbox</i>) Show, Don’t Tell Story Rewrite
Checkpoint 4	Literary Analysis	Literary Response Journals
Checkpoint 5	Prewriting	Thoughts on Life’s Obstacles Personal Narrative Plot Diagram Personal Narrative Outline Personal Narrative Characterization Paragraphs
Checkpoint 6	Drafting/Revising	Personal Narrative Draft Constructive Criticism Evaluation Tone and Mood Revision ws Personal Narrative Revision
Checkpoint 7	Editing/Publishing	Ratiocination Final Personal Narrative Obstacle Introduction
Checkpoint 8	Reflection	Personal Narrative Reflection Sheet

Stage 3: Learning Activities

Day 1: Review plot progression using the plot diagram. Students will watch Disney’s “Life with Derek” and discuss parts of the show that introduce the setting and characters, the parts of the show when the events get more and more tense, and the part when things get so bad that it cannot get worse. As a class, fill out Somebody Wanted But So chart which helps students grasp plot and main idea at its most basic level. Read aloud and discuss using three-column notes the story “Wilma Unlimited” by Kathleen Krull. The three-column notes strategy is used to analyze points in the story that apply to each step in the plot diagram. After reading, in groups, students will then chart the plot to “Wilma Unlimited” on the plot diagram and provide short answers why they labeled each component of the plot diagram the way that they did. Class will discuss the obstacles that Wilma faced as a child and how she overcame these obstacles through determination and diligence. In their literary response journal, students will write about what they learned reading about Wilma’s story.

Day 2: In groups, students read a number of Peanuts comic strips. As a group, the students choose a character to discuss. Topics of discussion will include what the character is like, what the character consistently wants, what kinds of friendships does that character have, and how does the character change through the years of the comic strip. As a class, discuss how an author creates a character through traits, motivation, relationships to other characters, and how the character changes. Next, the students will regroup and create an entirely new comic strip *sequel* that centers around the chosen character. This character needs to maintain the traits, motivations, etc. The group will present the new comic strip to the class, and the class will discuss if the integrity of the character was maintained.

Day 3: Read “Raymond’s Run” as a class. While students read the first part of the story aloud, they mark text for evidence of character traits, motivations, conflicts, etc for the two main characters Squeaky and Raymond and a minor character like May Louise. The students will then interpret what this evidence means in terms of characterization. The students will repeat this process of reading, text marking, and interpreting in pairs. Next, in groups, students will fill out a characterization chart on the two main characters to determine how complex the characters are and how they have changed from the beginning of the story to the end. This will lead to a discussion of dynamic, round characters. Next, the students will fill out a characterization chart on the characters that have maintained the same characteristics with little complexity, which will lead to a discussion of flat, static characters and the supporting role that these characters play in stories. Students will write a descriptive paragraph, choosing one dynamic, round character and one flat, static character. Lastly, students will discuss in their groups what Squeaky has learned from her experiences. They will take quick notes of this discussion in their response journals.

Day 4: Class will listen to two pieces of classical music, Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” and Beethoven’s “Fifth Symphony.” The students will write about how they feel as they listen to the two pieces. Teacher will read aloud to the class “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street.” As the play is read aloud, students will jot down signal words and phrases that the author uses to make the reader feel scared. Next, the teacher will read the children’s book *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* by Eileen Spinelli, and the students will jot down words and phrases that the author uses to make the reader feel at times elated and happy and at times sad and dark. The class will then discuss the general categories of tone—positive, neutral, and negative. In groups students will read Ken Mochizuki’s “Passage to Freedom” and Caroline Paul’s “Fighting Fire” while filling out tone chart with the three general categories. As the students read the story, they will write down words and phrases that the author uses and categorize them under the three categories. They will then put a more specific label on each word or phrase. For instance, specific labels for the negative tone category could be anger, sadness, or despair. The class will share these tone and mood words, which will then be displayed as a word wall.

Day 5: Teacher will read an adjusted form of “Fighting Fire” that does not include any imagery or sensory details. Students will raise their hands when they feel like they have been drawn into the story, when they feel like they are there. Of course, this will not occur. Then the teacher will read the actual story, and during the reading, students will raise their hands when the author uses heavy imagery and sensory details to draw in the reader. At this time, the reading will stop, and the students will draw the scene, integrating as many sensory details as they can. This process continues until the story is complete. Students will explore the difference between the two versions of the story and the effect that the difference had on their investment in the story in their journals. Next, in pairs students will receive 2 pictures in which the subjects are in situations that are very stimulating to the senses (for instance, photo of an NBA basketball player in a sold-out stadium making a lay-up the last second of the game). They may not show each other the pictures. Students will close their eyes, pretending they are the subject of the pictures and tell their partners everything the subject is emotionally feeling, thinking, touching, hearing, tasting, seeing, and smelling. The partners will write down the words and speculate what the picture is and what the subject is doing. Lastly, the student, using his/her own picture, will write a paragraph using sensory details pretending he/she is in that situation. Discuss with the class how authors explode important moments in stories to draw in their readers.

Day 6: Teacher will act out a number of skits, like being angry, in love, nervous, etc. At this time, students write down everything that the teacher’s face and body do as well as what she sounds and looks like. On the board, teacher will write, “She is angry.” Volunteers will write their responses on the board until a full picture is drawn of the teacher’s skit. Discuss with class which is better for an author to use—the passive voice (She is angry.) OR the active voice (Slamming the door shut, her face turned red like a cherry tomato. She stomped across the room, yelling at anyone who crossed her path.). Next, in their journals, the students will compare a story that uses passive voice (*tells* the reader) to a story that uses active voice (*showing* the reader). Lastly, in groups, students will receive stories that tell, not show. They will discuss and rewrite that story so that shows and does not tell. Groups will then present their two versions of the story to the class.

Day 7: The class will discuss the common thread that runs through many of the stories read in class—each of the main characters face hurdles, internal or external, to achieve and grow as a person. Using text evidence, students will complete a literary analysis in their journals exploring the characters, the obstacles they have faced, how the characters have grown as a result of these hardships, how the audience can learn from understanding these pieces, and how they think the authors have changed as a result of writing these stories. Students may also explore how some authors explored the obstacles better than others. Students will need access to some of the authors’ biographies either online or in the textbook.

Day 8: Discuss the meaning of the saying, “The road to success is paved with hardships and obstacles.” Class discusses what this saying means and the implications of this saying in their lives. Read aloud *Cinderella* and discuss the character’s hardships and struggles that she had to face to achieve her dreams. Students complete Thoughts on Life’s Obstacles Exploration, which will help them prepare for the next step of brainstorming obstacles that they have faced in their lives. This can be completed in either pairs or group discussions. After reviewing the plot diagram, students will organize the events of the story on a plot diagram. In groups of 3-4, students will tell their stories to group members. While authors are sharing their stories, the group members perform a number of tasks. First, they must plot the story on a diagram and compare the author’s plot to group members’ plot. Next the group and the author discuss discrepancies between the diagrams. They will also discuss possible adjustments that might need to be made and elements or events that need to be added or removed to clarify and focus the story.

Day 9: Students will outline their stories to ensure focus of topic. As students create their outlines, the teacher will create a model outline on the board of an obstacle she has faced. The first Roman numeral will be the main idea for the exposition of the story. To elaborate, the students will write *important* supporting details of the exposition, which will be the A, B, C, etc. under Roman numeral I. The next few Roman numerals will focus on the main ideas of each event in the rising action. Again, to elaborate on each event, the students will write important supporting details of each event. The next Roman numeral will center around the climax. Students will continue this exercise of main idea and elaboration until they have reached the denouement or resolution. After reviewing the meaning of constructive feedback, students will trade with a partner to review and give feedback about what should be added, changed, or removed.

Day 10: To refresh their memories on characterization, students will review character analysis on dynamic versus static characters and round versus flat characters. Additionally, the class will discuss how to analyze characters for their traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes they undergo. Students will use their analytical skills to synthesize the characters in their stories. They will write a characterization paragraph for each character in their stories. This paragraph must include traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes that the dynamic characters undergo and why. If time permits, students may draw a picture of each character that properly reflects their traits, motivations, etc.

Day 11: After reviewing the two development strategies show, don’t tell (SDT) and explode the moment (ETM), students will identify the most important events in their stories on their outlines. Using the model outline, teacher will walk the students through taking the outline and forming it into a draft while emphasizing the importance developing the characters in the story. When reaching an important event in the story, the teacher will model how to employ the SDT and ETM strategy. Teacher will model how to get past a writer’s block by closing her eyes and picturing the events as if she is right there. Students will finish drafting their essays while teacher conducts individual conferencing with each student. If the students get stuck, they may refer to their SDT and ETM exercises in their portfolios for guidance.

Day 12: Students will read each others’ drafts, particularly focusing on development of characters, SDT, and ETM using the Constructive Criticism Evaluation form. This form is primarily a guide for the students to use when they debrief each other on their thoughts on the stories and advice on what parts need adjustment. The authors will then write a revision making the changes their partners suggested.

Day 13: On the Tone Revision worksheet, authors will write the tone that they intended to achieve of each event in their stories. In groups, students will read one story at a time, discussing the mood of each event while the author stays absolutely silent. Group members will complete the Mood Revision worksheet. Next, the author and the group will compare the tone and the mood worksheets to determine if the author’s intentions were successfully conveyed to the audience. The group will then suggest possible words and phrases that will convey the author’s tone. The students will create a new revision, being sure to

skip lines for the editing process.

Day 14: Students will ratiocinate the essays for basic conventions including any specific grammar or punctuation lessons that were taught in that grading period. Students will rotate their essays to different readers who look for specific convention errors. Authors will then write a final personal narrative.

Day 15: Students will read introductions to books and stories and discuss why introductions are often helpful and sometimes needed to preface a story or essay. In groups or in pairs, authors will discuss the meaning of obstacles, why they feel obstacles can be helpful in life, how people can learn from them, and how people can overcome them. Using the examples of introductions and the Obstacle Introduction Guide, authors will write their introductions to their narratives.

After Narratives are Graded with Rubric and Handed Back:

Class will discuss the nature and necessity of reflection so that writers may grow and improve. Teacher will model how to reflect using some of her own writing. Authors complete a reflection sheet for their narratives.

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Somebody Wanted But So

This strategy will help you get down to the nitty-gritty of summarizing and plot analysis.

Somebody— identify the protagonist	
Wanted— what they wanted to achieve	
But— identify the problem	
So— identify the resolution	

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Three Column Notes
“Wilma Unlimited” by Kathleen Krull

Directions:

1. As you read “Wilma Unlimited” find text evidence for each of the plot elements.
2. Then, interpret the text evidence, proving that evidence exemplifies that plot element.

Plot Elements	Text Evidence with Page #	Interpretation of Evidence
Exposition		
Rising Action		
Climax		
Falling Action		
Resolution		

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Characterization Chart

Directions:

1. After reading the story, copy sentences (cite page numbers) from the story that give indications of characterization (traits, motivations, conflicts, and relationships).
2. Interpret those sentences, or text evidence, for characterization. What does that text evidence show about the character?
3. Then, answer the questions below.

Character's Name:

Sentences (text evidence); Provide page number	What does this text evidence show about the character?

1. Has this character changed from the beginning to the end? If so, how? If not, why?

2. What type of character (round, flat, dynamic, static) is he/she? Explain why.

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Tone
“Passage to Freedom” and “Fighting Fire”

Story	Text Evidence with page number	Tone— positive, negative, or neutral	More Specific Label
“Passage to Freedom” by Ken Mocizuki			
“Fighting Fire” by Caroline Paul			

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Thoughts on Life's Obstacles Exploration

Directions:

Answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

1. Keeping in mind all of the stories we have read in class, how do you define life's obstacle?

2. What do some of these obstacles include?

3. List as many obstacles that you have experienced in life as you can!

4. Choose a few from the list above that you feel others would want to learn about and you feel are unique experiences. Briefly describe each obstacle.

5. What have you learned from these experiences?

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Personal Narrative Outline

Directions:

1. Using your plot diagram, outline the main events of the story using the Roman numerals.
2. To elaborate, write the important supporting details using the alphabet letters.
3. You may add more Roman numerals letters as you need.

I. First Main Event (exposition)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

II. Second Main Event (rising action)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

III. Third Main Event (rising action)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

IV. Fourth Main Event (rising action)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

V. Fifth Main Event (rising action/ climax)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

VI. Sixth Main Event (climax/falling action)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

VII. Seventh Main Event (falling action/conclusion)

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

Evaluator's Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Constructive Criticism Evaluation

(author's name and narrative title)

1. After reading the story, determine the important events of the story and write them below.

2. How has the author developed those important moments?

3. What suggestions do you have to improve those important moments?

4. List the important characters.

5. How did the author develop these characters?

6. What suggestions do you have to develop the important characters?

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Ratiocination:

(narrative title)

Directions:

1. Pass your essay with this form stapled on top.
2. Grader:
 1. Sign your initials on the next convention area on the chart below.
 2. Read the essay once quickly to get the basic idea.
 3. Starting from the end, read the sentences looking only for they specific convention area that is next on the chart below.
 4. When you find an error in your convention area, color the error in the color indicated in the chart.

Convention Area	Color	Grader Initials
Commas in a series of three or more items	red	
Comma to separate two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction	orange	
Comma to separate the dependent clause in a complex sentence when it comes first	yellow	
Correct apostrophe usage in contractions	green	
Correct apostrophe usage in possessives	blue	
Subject-Verb Agreement	purple	
Pronoun Referents	gray	
Capitalize proper nouns	brown	
Capitalize beginning of each sentence	pink	
Correct homophone usage (its, it's; where, wear, were, we're; through, threw, etc.)	black (color lightly)	

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Obstacle Introduction Guide

You will complete this form to help you form the introduction to your obstacle personal narrative. Answer the questions with thoughtful, well-developed responses. Do this to the best of your ability.

1. What is an obstacle?

2. How can obstacles affect a person's life?

3. How can people learn from obstacles?

4. How can people overcome obstacles?

5. How can people who have experienced obstacles in their lives help others?

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Personal Narrative Reflection:

(narrative title)

1. Write a full, developed response that explains you think that you deserve/do not deserve the grade you received.

2. After reading other students' writing and distancing yourself from the writing, how deeply do you think you thought about your topic? How deeply did you write about your topic? Be honest.

3. Using text evidence, what of the following needs improvement? Explain why in fully developed responses.

___ focus on topic ___ SDT ___ ETM ___ developing strong characters
___ tone/mood ___ conventions

4. Using text evidence, what of the following is a strength? Explain why in fully developed responses.

___ focus on topic ___ SDT ___ ETM ___ developing strong characters
___ tone/mood ___ conventions

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Personal Narrative Rubric

(narrative title)

	1	2	3	4
Focus and Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates little focus • Too much is covered • Abrupt shifts in ideas • Ideas are randomly presented • No details support main idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat focused • Broad topic • Shifts in ideas are quick, but understandable • Few details support main idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused • Narrow topic • Logical connections • Details support ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains focus • Topic is narrow, but developed • Smooth, seamless connections between ideas • Details add depth to main idea
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No development • Plot summary of events with no depth of thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little development, may sometimes be irrelevant or unneeded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development allows reader to step into character's shoes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development allows reader to step into character's shoes • Development adds to depth of thought • Paints a total picture
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader cannot hear author's voice • Writing does not evoke the reader's emotions • No tone conveyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is generic • Writing begins to evoke reader's emotions • Tone is muddled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader can hear author's voice • Writing evokes reader's emotions • Tone is clearly conveyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader can hear the author's voice • Words come alive and evoke emotions in reader • Tone is clearly conveyed and adds to overall meaning
Characterization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters are not developed • All characters are flat, even main characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writer begins to develop characters, but does so inconsistently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main characters are developed • Reader can identify with character's situation and emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main characters are fully developed, complex • Reader can identify with character's situation and emotions • Evidence of depth of thought
Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe, frequent errors make it difficult to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Error weaken flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good command of conventions , errors do not weaken flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent, strong command of conventions

Name:
Period:

Teacher:
Date:

Plot Diagram

Exposition: lays the background information, introduces the characters and setting

Inciting Force: first incident of the story that starts the action

Rising Action: events of the story that comprise of the conflict, the tension of each event getting worse and worse

Climax: turning point of the story, moment of greatest intensity

Falling Action: events following the climax, how the conflict gets solved

Denouement: resolution, outcome of the conflict

