

# Supporting Students with Transitions by Developing the Skill of Self-Reflection

A Promising Practice Guide Based on the Work of NYC Lab Middle School

Promoting Academic and Personal Behaviors at  
New York City Lab Middle School

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With Support from:  
NYC Department of Education  
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## Academic Behaviors Guides: An Introduction

In the 2012-13 school year, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) laid out, for the first time, a set of academic and personal behaviors critical for New York City’s public school students to be college and career ready. Based on a growing body of research that demonstrates the critical nature of a set of skills and mindsets to successful learning, the NYCDOE identified persistence, academic engagement, communication and collaboration, work habits and organization, and self-regulation as key to student success.

In addition to identifying the importance of these skills and behaviors, the NYCDOE committed to exploring how its schools are developing effective resources and scaffolds to address them. Working with Eskolta, the NYCDOE launched the Academic Behaviors Pilot with five schools—two middle schools, two high schools, and one transfer school. These schools engaged in an inquiry process whereby they simultaneously studied their existing efforts to promote academic behaviors and set out to deepen those efforts through new practices.

From this work, the NYCDOE and Eskolta jointly published a series of four guides. Each guide highlights a set of practices at one school: a student “desktop rubric” at School for Classics; a system for assessing and giving feedback on key student behaviors and mindsets at Soundview Academy for Scholarship and Culture; lessons that integrate writing and exploration of self-identity at New York City Lab Middle School; and a series of activities for students to reflect on off-site internships at Flushing International High School.

This publication shares resources and materials from New York City Lab Middle School. It is designed to highlight specific steps and materials that the school has used in its efforts to promote self-regulation and engagement, making these accessible for other schools and educators to adapt to their needs. Each guide also provides background context on the school to help readers understand the way in which school structures and culture enabled the effective development and deployment of the work.

In sharing these resources, we hope to further reflection on and discussion of the academic and personal behaviors and their critical role in our schools. We welcome educators’ comments and feedback on this important work for New York City’s children, and look forward to much-needed attention to these critical skills and behaviors in our public schools.

Sincerely,

**Andrea Soonachan**  
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## Academic and Personal Behaviors: Self-Regulation and Engagement

Harvard University researchers Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne Bouffard (2012) draw on the principles of developmental psychology to consider how schools can better support adolescents in developing the academic and personal behaviors critical to success in college and career. Their research points to the importance of creating opportunities for young people to explore their identities in school. Through self-reflection, students can develop a college-going identity – the sense that “people like them” go to college – as well as the critical academic behaviors of self-regulation and self-efficacy. This emphasis on identity and self-regulation maps on to the New York City Department of Education’s focus on the academic and personal behaviors of self-regulation and engagement.

**Engagement** supports student achievement by increasing their socio-emotional connection to, and confidence in, the environment. At NYC Lab Middle School (or “Lab”), to promote engagement, the sixth-grade Humanities department designed a unit focused on identity (the “Name Unit”) with ample opportunity to hear student voices and learn about students’ unique identities. Such opportunities help students develop a sense of self-efficacy: the conviction that they have the ability to be engaged and thoughtful learners with stories worth telling.

**Self-regulation** entails developing the self-control, coping skills, and confidence necessary to overcome challenges. Cultivating the ability to self-reflect is key to self-regulation. By building extensive opportunities for reflection into the Name Unit, sixth-grade Humanities teachers at Lab help students begin to develop the ability to reflect on their past experiences and on their identities as students. These reflective skills support students in making well-considered decisions as middle school, high school, and college students.

This Guide focuses on two of the five NYC Department of Education Academic and Personal Behaviors

Persistence

**Engagement**

Collaboration & Communication

Work Habits & Organization

**Self-Regulation**

**Engagement** supports achievement in school by increasing students' social-emotional connection to the environment and their social confidence.

**Self-Regulation** is key to resiliency. Students must develop coping skills, self-control, and confidence to work through challenges.

## Lab Middle School's Name Unit: Using Self-Reflection to Build Writing Skills and Academic Behaviors

**Introducing Lab Middle School Lab: A focus on collaboration, compassion, diversity, and academic rigor.** This guide is based on the work of the sixth-grade Humanities department at NYC Lab Middle School. The school, located in Manhattan, serves 562 students. Teachers and guidance staff work diligently to integrate the “Lab values”—collaboration, compassion, diversity and pluralism, and academic rigor—into their work with students. As guidance counselor Jeanine Mastrangelo describes, “We pay a lot of attention to character, reflecting on who you are and how you’re treating others in our school.”

**School data suggest that the transition into middle school is highly successful at NYC Lab Middle School.** During the second half of the 2012-2013 school year, the school administered Engage, an online assessment recently developed by the American College Testing organization (ACT) to assess students' academic discipline, commitment to school, optimism, family attitude toward education, family involvement, relationship with school personnel, school safety climate, managing feelings, orderly conduct, and thinking before acting. Lab sixth-graders scored higher than average on almost every one of these behaviors. In particular, school-wide strengths appeared to be orderly conduct (with 82% of

## Supporting Students with Transitions through a Unit Focused on Self-Reflection

**Building reflection into learning** is critical to student growth. Opportunities for critical reflection help students develop the academic behaviors and attitudes instrumental to success in college — particularly resilience, self-control, and confidence. Creating opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on their identity encourages them to view themselves as learners, thinkers, and scholars. Without careful planning, however, it can be difficult to find time amidst the many demands of the curriculum for students to engage in self-reflection.

At Lab, the sixth-grade Humanities department supports young people with the transition to middle school by beginning the year with the Name Unit, a series of writing exercises that emphasize reflection on identity integrated into Common Core-aligned activities.

For several years, the sixth-grade Humanities department at Lab has started the school year by introducing the “Lab values” to students. Through years of revision, the Humanities department has developed the Name Unit to incorporate activities that they have found most effectively allow students to creatively explore their identities while simultaneously developing their writing skills.

The unit's simple yet focused approach makes the self-reflective nature of the work an entry point for students to develop awareness and engagement in the academic community without diverting class time from key literacy skill-building.

## Objectives

Develop a unit through which students:

- 1. Build metacognitive skills and awareness.** The Name Unit asks students to reflect on their identity and write about themselves in a variety of formats, from narrative to poem. Beginning the year with a focus on student self-identity emphasizes that each student's interpretation of texts occurs through their unique lens, enabling the development of metacognitive critical thinking.
- 2. Build confidence as writers.** Students engage in scaffolded writing activities while writing about themselves — a topic on which they are more expert than any of their teachers. This helps them to experience writing as experts from the first day of middle school and thus builds confidence and connection to learning for future work.
- 3. Develop self-regulatory skills** by practicing reflection and collaboration and discussing one's identity and background with peers.
- 4. Increase academic engagement** through activities that ask students to critically self-reflect and work closely with their peers as they explore academic writing. This self-reflection in an academic context helps students see the connection between their own narrative and the skill of writing narratives.

## Strategies

In the activities from the Name Unit from Lab, four key strategies stand out.

**Teach textual analysis as a form of self-analysis.**

The activities are not set up as explicitly teaching

Lab students scoring above average) and academic self-discipline (with 75% of students scoring above average). These results are consistent with Lab's high scores on the Learning Environment Survey (LES) conducted annually by the New York City Department of Education. Students and teachers put Lab's LES scores—particularly for those questions related to academic behaviors—among the highest among middle schools in the city.

“ [For] the kids who don't see themselves as writers, any writing assignment, at first, is scary...What I really like about reflective pieces is that there's not a right answer, so it helps build their confidence as writers — [we're] just asking them to be honest about their experience. ”  
— Monica Smith, Teacher

““ This project allowed us to explore ourselves in a new way, because I found out what my name actually means. ””  
— Sixth-Grader at Lab

““ I learned a lot from this project because it was the first project like this I had ever done. We didn't do stuff like this in elementary school. It taught me how to do a project, what it means to work hard. ””  
— Sixth-Grader at Lab

““ This project is an introduction to us! ””  
— Sixth-Grader at Lab

self-analysis, but rather draw upon the fact that analyzing characters in fiction can be similar to analyzing ourselves as characters. By explicitly considering this overlap, the unit builds both skills simultaneously. As the Common Core State Standards emphasize deep reading of texts, this focus on academic behaviors provides a place for thoughtful text-to-self connections.

**Scaffold identity exploration** through collaboration. Identity exploration can be daunting for students in middle school and high school, especially those who do not self-identify as scholars and may therefore most need support. By reflecting on texts, reflecting on self, and then reviewing reflection with peers, the unit sets up a three-step process for students to revise and deepen their own understanding of themselves while revising and deepening their writing.

**Focus on brief written pieces that highlight craft and character.** The written activities in the unit are relatively brief. This enables teachers to focus on word choice, revision, and peer editing as elements that deepen reflection, self-regulation, and engagement in the academic community.

**Make room for self-reflection without complete exposure.** Some of what is notable about these activities, designed to integrate student self-reflection and engagement in the school community, is not what they do, but what they do not do. Students are not asked to analyze or critique their own academic experiences, they are not asked to write about their relationship to the school community, and they are not asked to share their personal reflections with more than a small group. The activities thus create a safe and structured classroom space for writing to generate self-reflection.

## The Name Anecdote

### Essential Questions

- What is an anecdote?
- Why do we tell stories?
- What lies behind my name?

### Understandings

*Students will understand that:*

1. Names can reveal information about a person's history and identity.
2. Anecdotes include a beginning, middle, and end, as well as details, dialogue, and description.
3. Narrative writing is a process that includes pre-writing, multiple drafts, and peer editing.

*Students will know:*

- Definition of annotation
- Definition of anecdote

*Students will be able to:*

- Annotate a text
- Draft and revise an anecdote based on a pre-write
- Engage in guided peer editing

### Performance Tasks

- Students will follow conventions to write a narrative of how they got their name or nickname

### Other Evidence

- Completed "Name Super Web"
- Completed anecdote pre-writing sheet

## The Name Anecdote

### Background

The name anecdote is the most complex component of this unit. Students write an anecdote about the genesis of their name. To create the anecdote, they do research — interviewing family members about the source of their name — as well as extensive pre-writing and drafting. Each year, the Humanities team at Lab has worked together to refine the various pieces of the activity. For example, the "name questionnaire" students use to research the source of their name has been modified year after year. Recently, teachers added a second section to the questionnaire in which students reflect on their feelings about their name after interviewing family members about the source of their name. In addition, teachers have worked together to create new sample name anecdotes over the years.

### Common Core Standards Addressed

**CCSS.ELA.W.6.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

- **CCSS.ELA.W.6.3b.** Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

- **CCSS.ELA.W.6.3d.** Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

**CCSS.ELA.W.6.5.** With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

### Academic and Personal Behaviors Addressed: Self-Regulation

Develop students' ability to manage their own relationship to learning through the act of identity exploration in an academic context.

### Academic and Personal Behaviors Addressed: Engagement

Increase students' academic sense of connection to and confidence in the school environment through peer collaboration and opportunities to share their experiences.

“*The name anecdote project was nice because nobody had similar stories... It showed how we are unique. I learned that my middle name was named after my grandmother on my dad's side. And my dad always said I looked like her when she was young.*”  
— Sixth-Grader at Lab

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## Day 1: The Name Anecdote

### Homework (Prior to Day 1)

Begin the lesson by assigning the Name Questionnaire for students to complete independently (see **Day 1 Handout 1a**). This assignment asks students to interview family members and raises a variety of low-level questions with direct answers about the root of their name, their own experience with their name, and their feelings about their name. The questionnaire asks students to "dig deep within yourself to answer these questions," setting a tone of honest and critical self-reflection.

### Day 1

On Day 1 of the unit, introduce students to the concept of anecdotes and the skill of annotation. Begin the unit with explanation and basic application of ideas. Focus questioning primarily on student self-reflection and awareness while introducing basic vocabulary. Complete the day by providing copies of the Name Super Web, a simple tool for students to annotate their own name based on the questions they answered previously using the Name Questionnaire.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Class notebooks
- Copies of quote "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet" (*Romeo & Juliet*) to be pasted in student notebooks
- Copies of Name Super Web (see **Day 1 Handout 1b**)
- Copies of the Name Questionnaire (see **Day 1 Handout 1a**)

#### PREPARATION REQUIRED

- Write definition of *anecdote* on the board
- Prepare student groupings for quote analysis activity



Name Questionnaire as an independent or in-class activity. The Name Questionnaire may be completed independently as homework, with students interviewing family members to learn about their own names. Teachers may wish to schedule in-class time to model completion of some of the elements of the worksheet or to discuss initial answers with students, giving them multiple days to complete it during a prior unit.



Use text to enhance self-reflection. By tying text-based writing with self-reflection, this unit helps students engage more deeply with the academic environment. It is important to note that, in this sense, some elements of this lesson are viewed not with the purpose of improving literary skills, but rather of enhancing self-reflective skills.

## Activities

### Individual work: Free-write

In class notebooks, ask students to respond to the question: *What comes to mind when you think of a rose?* Students free-write for 90 seconds, and then sketch a rose or continue to write.

### Whole class: Introduce “free-writing” and “annotation”

Explain concept of “free-writing” to students: Writing for a time period continuously, stream of consciousness — writing whatever comes to mind.

Introduce quote to students: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet.” Distribute small versions of the quote, and have students glue in their class notebook.

Ask students if anyone has ever underlined, highlighted, or written notes while reading a textbook or book. Explain that this is *annotating* and that we do this to understand a difficult text by interacting with it. Define *annotate (v): To understand a difficult text by breaking it down and adding notes.*

As a class, annotate the word “rose” using students’ free writes from the beginning of the period.

### Individual work: Annotate selected word

Ask students: *What other words should we annotate? (For example, “sweet” or “name.”)* Ask students to pick a word and annotate it individually.

### Small groups: Analyze quote

To the whole class, provide basic context of the quote you distributed earlier (that it is from the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare).

Break students into groups to discuss: *What do you think this quote means?*

Ask groups to share out answers and take notes on board. Summarize the gist of the quote on the board.

### Individual work: Reflect on names

Students individually respond to the question: *Would you be a different person if you had a different name?* 

Ask students to share answers from activity.

### Whole class: Model Name Super Web and assign for homework

Model completing Name Super Web based on Name Questionnaire before assigning the Name Super Web for homework. The Name Super Web is a simple activity for students to practice annotation while engaging in deeper exploration of their own identity. In modeling completion, help students understand how concepts in the Name Questionnaire can be connected and related to one another in a web.

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## Name Questionnaire Part 1 Interview Your Family

### Directions: You must get help from your family to complete this assignment!

- Ask your family the following questions. (You should ask your parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, family friends, neighbors... or anyone else who can tell you anything about your name!)
- Please answer all of the questions and write down as many details possible.
- Ask follow-up questions (beyond those written here) to get as much info as possible. Think of this as a treasure hunt for great stories!

Please note: the more information you have on this handout, the more material you'll have to work with when creating your name project. Feel free to attach additional loose-leaf paper!

### The Process of Naming

What is your FULL name? (First, middle and last names!)

\_\_\_\_\_

Who chose your first name (and middle name, if you have one)?

\_\_\_\_\_

How did he/she/they choose your name? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did everyone involved agree on the name? Yes No

Please explain why or why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What other names were considered for you? \_\_\_\_\_

Why were these other names rejected? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Heritage, Family History, and Meaning

Are there any naming traditions in your family? Yes No

Explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Are you named after anyone? Yes No

If "yes," who are you named after? (Grandfather, etc): \_\_\_\_\_

What is his/her name? \_\_\_\_\_

Why were you named after him or her? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think you are anything like him or her? Explain why or why not.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the origin of your surname (last name) in terms of your family's culture, ethnicity, or country of origin? Be as specific as possible! \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Has your last name ever been changed or shortened? Yes No

Why was it changed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does your first name mean? (Use a baby naming book or internet search to find out!)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does the meaning of your name fit (or not fit) with you as a person?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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## Name Questionnaire Name Super Web

**Directions:**

Write your full name on the line below.

Annotate it (write notes all around it). Follow the examples in your class notebook.

Write down any details you can think of — don't leave anything out.

Branch off of branches to create a crazy web of information about your name!

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## Day 2: The Name Anecdote



Personalizing name anecdotes can help engage students. At Lab, the Sample Name Anecdotes (see Day 2 Handout 2b) are written by and about the sixth-grade Humanities teachers. This demonstrates to students that their teachers also engage in the type of writing at the focus of the unit, and helps engage students by adding a layer of connection between students and the school environment.

## Day 2

On Day 2 of the unit, emphasize basic textual analysis as students explore the characteristics of an anecdote at slightly higher Depth of Knowledge —focusing on application of ideas they have learned. This roots the unit in academic skills prior to the upcoming emphasis on academic and personal behaviors. Provide students with sample anecdotes — both in written and in audio — to introduce them to exemplars (those used by Lab teachers are provided in the handouts). Alongside this, provide an analysis sheet that asks students to identify the purpose, beginning, middle, and end of an anecdote as they apply concepts to samples.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Class notebooks
- Technology to play radio story “The Greatest Dog Name in the World” for class (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/241/20-acts-in-60-minutes?act=7>)
- Copies of Anecdote Analysis Sheet (see Day 2 Handout 2a) for students and to share on projector or SmartBoard. This sheet asks students to identify the beginning, middle, and end of an anecdote and its purpose and style
- Copies of Sample Name Anecdotes (see Day 2 Handout 2b) to serve as models for student writing

### PREPARATION REQUIRED

- Write definition of anecdote on the board
- Prepare to play radio story for class
- Prepare student groupings for anecdote analysis activity (groups of four)



Story seeds help make sure every student has a story to tell. Teachers at Lab note that during this unit some students feel they do not have stories to tell. Assigning three story seeds for homework on this day of the unit helps ensure that students arrive at school the following day with different options to explore for their name anecdote. A story seed can be just a few sentences summarizing the story that could come from the Name Super Web — for example, “I got the nickname Sarita from my grandmother. It means ‘Little Sara’ in Spanish.”

## Activities

### Individual work: Respond to audio anecdote

Ask students to listen carefully to “The Greatest Dog Name in the World.” What do they notice?

### Whole class: Discuss, What is an anecdote?

Explain to class: This is an anecdote. Ask whole class to copy definition of anecdote into their class notebooks: *anecdote(n): A short account of a memorable, interesting, unique or humorous incident.*

Listen to story again and analyze on overhead using **Anecdote Analysis Sheet**.

### Small groups: Analyze name anecdotes

Distribute **Sample Name Anecdotes**  and **Anecdote Analysis Sheets** to students in groups of four.

Assign one anecdote to each table member, asking each group member to read assigned anecdote and fill out analysis sheet. (If they have time, they can read another anecdote.)

Jigsaw activity: Each group member shares their responses to the last two questions on the **Anecdote Analysis Sheet** with their group.

### Whole class: Discuss characteristics of anecdote as class

Ask class, what do all four anecdotes have in common? Chart characteristics of anecdote form on the board.

### Whole class: Assign homework to write a story seed

Model choosing a story seed from the **Name Super Web**,  and explain that homework will be to use Name Super Web in their class notebooks to jot down three story seeds that could become anecdotes.

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**Directions:** Silently read your assigned anecdote. Then, complete this side of the handout. When finished, re-read what you have written.

Anecdote # \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Write one sentence in each box.

<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>
<b>End</b>	

In one sentence, what is this anecdote about?

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What makes this a memorable, interesting, unique, or humorous story?

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**Anecdote #1**

### A Beautiful, Feminine Name

My mother loved the name Suzanne Louise — she had always loved the name — a beautiful feminine name. She had already given birth to two boys, my older brothers, and the idea that she might have a girly girl with a girly girl name was thrilling. My father agreed that Suzanne Louise was indeed a magnificent name. So it was decided — my name would be Suzanne Louise Frew. Suzanne Louise Frew. Suzanne Louise Frew. It did have a ring to it. But then... “Wait a minute,” my father said. “If her name was ever shortened, she would be Sue Lou Frew!” Back to the drawing board.

**Anecdote #2**

### A Naming Tradition Ignored

In my family, parents often come up with names for their babies by reusing the name of a family member from an earlier generation. The idea is that this family member can be remembered through the child, and then the child, in turn, might resemble that family member in some positive way. This naming tradition has been in my family for many generations, so I had no reason to think that it wouldn't be used for me.

Once I was old enough to know about our family naming tradition, I eagerly asked my parents where my name came from. My parents looked at each other, nodded, and told me why I was given the name Rebecca. It was because they loved the sound of my name: Rebecca. They loved the way the syllables rolled off the tongue. “But who was I named after?” I asked. “How can I try to resemble the original Rebecca, whoever she was, if I don't know anything about her?”

This time, my parents looked at each other, nodded, and told me. Rebecca was a beautiful name to them, so they decided to overlook the fact that the only Rebecca they had ever known (before me, of course) was a woman whom my mother once worked with — the most horribly mean, angry and miserable woman my mom had ever known. In other words, I wasn't named after a family member at all — I was given a name because my parents liked the sound of it. Needless to say, this was not quite the positive, traditional link I had been hoping for. So maybe instead of trying to be like the original Rebecca, my parents suggested that I could just be happy that my name had a beautiful sound. Rebecca.

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**Anecdote #3**

### The Nickname That Stuck

Throughout my life, I've had a variety of nicknames given to me by many different people. To my niece Abby, I'm "Monka." I'm "Monica Moo" to my cousin Robin. My husband calls me "Red," and a fellow teacher used to call me "Moni-love." These names are unique to the people who gave them to me; it would hurt my ears if anyone else tried to use them. There's only one nickname in my life that stuck, and I have my little brother Robert to thank for it.

I was in 6th grade, living in Argentina, and Robert was just beginning to speak. He babbled a lot and couldn't pronounce long words, so a name like "Monica" was difficult for him to say. The best he could do was to say, "Maca," so that is what I became to him. After all, he was just a baby, and I forgave the fact that the name sounded really silly. Then, my family started calling me Maca. Even though it was a little annoying, I let it slide. Besides, there were seven of them and only one of me, so it was no use fighting them!

One day, my friends were over after school and my little brother ran into my room in his diaper yelling, "Maca! Maca!" My friends burst into laughter, thought the name was hilarious, and it just stuck! I even got nicknames for my nickname, such as "Maca Flaca" and "Maca la Vaca" (which mean "Skinny Maca" and "Maca the Cow" in Spanish). All my hopes that this nickname would eventually disappear were lost. To this day, my friends and family still call me "Maca." I've grown to love this silly nickname given to me by my baby brother.

**Anecdote #4**

### The Name Whisperer

"What do you want to put on the birth certificate?" the doctor asked in an officious manner. My father had wanted to name me Stephanie if I was a girl or Ludwig if I was a boy. (Thank goodness I wasn't born a boy!) He was a musician who played saxophone in a number of bands. Consequently, he worked late into the evenings and slept most mornings until the early afternoon. I was born at 12:14 p.m., so the story goes.

Passed out asleep in the chair next to my mother's hospital bed, my father didn't hear my mother when she whispered, sneaky and quiet as a mouse, "Hayley."

My mother loves to tell this story, and my stepfather always cries with pride when he hears it, like he had been there for the event. I never really knew my real father. I have no living memories of him. I only know him from his recordings and his postcards he would send from the road to my uncles when they were children and aspiring horn players.

Whenever I think about the story of my name, I conjure up the idea of my father, held together with tape, postcards and music, and place him in the chair ever so carefully. And sometimes, I could swear I hear my stepfather waiting in another room, crying, when my mother whispers, "Hayley."

## Day 3: The Name Anecdote



The Pre-Writing Worksheet helps students structure their thoughts. Smith adds, “Some students really struggle with structure,” rather than crafting the narrative itself. The Pre-Writing Worksheet (see Day 3 Handout 3a) emphasizes that the anecdote has to have a beginning, middle, and end.



Individual conferencing can help students hone in on a story idea. Sixth-grade teacher Monica Smith observes, “Crafting a story is really hard for a lot of the students.” She notes that it is important to help students tease out anything about their name that makes them unique, including sitting with them and reviewing their name web and noting, “This would make a good story.” This individual conference time can take place during individual writing time on the third day of the unit, and supports students in thinking reflectively about their personal histories.

### Day 3

On Day 3, focus on scaffolding writing skills as students begin to work independently on their stories. By sharing the thinking behind their stories with peers, they develop a sense of engagement in the academic community and self-recognition skills through reflection on their own identities. Students begin to engage in higher-level questioning that ties into the academic behavior of engagement by contemplating how stories serve as a connection to our environment.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Copies of Pre-Writing Sheet (see Day 3 Handout 3a). This sheet mimics the Anecdote Analysis Sheet that students used on the previous day, but shifts the focus from textual analysis to writing skills as students are asked to identify a purpose, beginning, middle, and end for their anecdote.

### Activities

#### Individual work: Explore why we do tell stories

In class notebooks, ask students to respond to: Why do we tell stories? Students share answers in whole class discussion.

#### Pair share: Students share story seeds

Students share their story seeds with a partner. Students choose a seed to “plant” and star it in their class notebook.

#### Whole class: Review pre-writing sheet

Review Pre-Writing Sheet with whole class. Model how to turn a pre-write into an anecdote, including details, dialogue, description, and imagination.

#### Individual work: Pre-writing

Students work on Pre-Writing Sheet.

#### Whole class: Assign homework to draft anecdote

Ask students to draft name anecdote based on pre-writing sheet in their class notebooks.

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## Name Anecdote Pre-Writing Sheet

**Directions: Use the lines and boxes below to map out your “Name Anecdote.” Be clear and concise!**

In one or two sentences, what is your “story seed?” (What is your anecdote going to be about?) Write it here:

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Now, write out your ideas for each part of your anecdote:

**Beginning (How will you open/start your story?)**

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**Middle (What will the “bulk” of your story be about?)**

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**End (How will you wrap it up or finish the story?)**

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## How do I turn my ideas into a lively ANECDOTE?

Here are some ideas...

Keep it short. Go for 1-3 short paragraphs!

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Part of your story:

<p><b>Beginning</b> It all started when...</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p><b>Middle</b> But then...</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p><b>End</b> To this day...</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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## Day 4: The Name Anecdote

**Steps for Guided Peer Editing****Guided Peer Revisions**

1. Drop your pencil.
2. Read your partner's anecdote twice, *silently!*  
*On a sticky note:*
3. Write one compliment!
4. Write one clarifying question.
5. Write one suggestion for where more detail may be needed.

**Guided Peer Edit**

1. Read your partner's anecdote and revisions silently!
2. Is the 1<sup>st</sup> line of each paragraph indented?  
→
3. Is the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of every sentence capitalized?
4. Are all proper nouns capitalized? (Mrs. Smith and Luke want to know!)
5. Does each sentence end with the correct punctuation (.)
6. Are there any spelling errors?



**Guided peer editing builds valuable thinking skills. Guided peer editing is a helpful structure for helping students engage in productive collaboration. By laying out clear steps for the revision and editing process, teachers provide the tools students need to support each other with writing constructively. This activity helps students develop the ability to communicate effectively with their peers, as well as reflect on the writing of others — particularly when formulating compliments, clarifying questions, and suggestions.**

**Day 4**

In the final day of work on the name anecdote, students engage in peer editing and feedback, bringing them to higher levels of thinking through interactive work around writing. At the same time, as peers read one another's personal stories, they inevitably engage in deeper reflection on their own identity and role within the school community.

**MATERIALS NEEDED**

Post-It notes

**PREPARATION REQUIRED**

Post steps for Guided Peer Editing on the board. 

**Activities****Individual work: Explore difference between revising and editing**

Ask students to respond to question: *What is the difference between revising your work and editing your work?*

**Whole class: Discuss guided peer edit process**

Introduce Guided Peer Revision and Edit process to class. This asks students to engage in a series of scaffolded steps to provide feedback on writing and appropriate grade-level writing conventions. 

Ask students to follow steps on board to revise, and then edit for capitalization, spelling, punctuation, indentation, etc.

**Whole class: Share out anecdotes**

Five students volunteer to read their name anecdotes out loud.

**Individual writing time**

Students use remaining time to revise their name anecdotes.

**Whole class: Assign homework to complete second draft**

As homework, ask students to prepare second draft of name anecdote typed or on looseleaf paper.

# The Bio-Poem and the Six-Word Memoir

## The Bio-Poem and the Six-Word Memoir (2 days)

### Background

Like the name anecdote, this component of the unit has evolved over time. Rather than have students write a bio-poem, for example, students used to write an acrostic poem. However, teachers found that the bio-poem afforded students much-needed structure while allowing them to reflect more deeply about their identities than the acrostic had. Certain lines in the bio-poem ask students to write about their hopes, fears, and accomplishments. In addition, rather than a six-word memoir, students used to write a “definition of you.” However, teachers found the six-word memoir — in spite of its brevity, or perhaps because of it — yielded richer creative works from students. To inspire students, teachers provide several models, including a series of six-word memoirs available on the NPR web site.

### Established Goals for Bio-Poem and Six-Word Memoir Common Core Standards Addressed

**CCSS.ELA.W.6.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

- **CCSS.ELA.W.6.3b.** Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

- **CCSS.ELA.W.6.3d.** Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

### Essential Questions

- How can I use words to capture the essence of a character?
- What is the essence of me as a character?

### Understandings

*Students will understand that:*

1. Different literary genres can be used for self-expression

*Students will know:*

- The definition of memoir
- Literary elements of a poem (e.g., rhyme, rhythm/meter, diction)

*Students will be able to:*

- Write a poem about themselves using a structure
- Express ideas succinctly capturing elements of a character through word choice

### Performance Tasks

- Students will write a “bio-poem” using a model structure.
- Students will write a “six-word memoir.”

### Other Evidence

- Whole class bio-poem for fictional character
- Group six-word memoir for fictional character

**CCSS.ELA.W.6.5.** With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

### Academic and Personal Behaviors Addressed:

**Self-Regulation.** Develop students’ ability to manage their own relationship to learning through the act of identity exploration in an academic context.

### Academic and Personal Behaviors Addressed:

**Engagement.** Increase students’ academic sense of connection to and confidence in the school environment through peer collaboration and opportunities to share their experiences.

### Essential Questions

- How can I use words to capture the essence of a character?
- What is the essence of me as a character?

### Understandings

*Students will understand that:*

1. Different literary genres can be used for self-expression

*Students will know:*

- The definition of memoir
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- Students will write a “bio-poem” using a model structure.
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## Day 5: The Bio-Poem

### Day 5

On Day 5 of the set of activities, the bio-poem builds on the scaffolding already established in the previous four-day Name activity. The activity lets you step back from student self-reflection initially, giving students room to engage directly with texts before they return to reflecting on their own names and character traits. The bio-poem format provides a new, creative way for students to consider literary elements in poetry while also reflecting more deeply on their own character traits.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

PowerPoint or chart paper with guidelines for bio-poem (see **Bio-Poem Format in Day 5 Handout 5b**)  
Sample bio-poems (see **Day 5 Handout 5a**)  
Copies of bio-poem homework assignment (**Day 5 Handout 5b**)

#### PREPARATION REQUIRED

Prepare groupings for group practice activity

### Activities

#### Individual work: Introduce bio-poem to students

Using the prepared PowerPoint or chart, review the format (above) for the bio-poem and sample poems (included in **Day 5 Handout 5a**).

#### Small groups: Write a bio-poem based on a fictional character

Ask students to write a bio-poem for a character from a book the class has been reading.

Break class into groups: Each group is assigned one line of the bio-poem to write.

As a class, compile the poem. Discuss word choice, rhythm, line breaks, and order of lines.

#### Individual work: Draft individual poems

Hand out the template for bio-poems (see **Day 5 Handout 5b**) for students to work independently on drafting their own bio-poem about themselves.

#### Whole group: Assign homework to type bio-poem

Ask students to write up bio-poem clearly typed or on loose leaf.



The bio-poem provides an explicit structure for the written piece, but with significant opportunities to personalize based on the history and preferences of the writer. The activity gives students the opportunity to engage in reflective thinking and writing about their relationships, feelings, fears, and achievements with the support of a straightforward structure. Furthermore, by giving students the opportunity to write a poem — rather than a narrative — students who may struggle to organize their thoughts in longer writing are able to experiment with expressing themselves in different ways.

“There were ten different lines in the bio-poem: where you were born, what we like to do, favorite things...The hard part was figuring out what you wanted to put down. Some people like a lot of things, so it's hard to get down to a few things.”

— Sixth-Grader at Lab

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### Bio-Poem Format

(Line 1) First name (*required*)

(Line 2) Three or four adjectives that describe the person

(Line 3) Important relationship (daughter of . . . , mother of . . . , etc.)

(Line 4) Two or three things, people, or ideas that the person loves

(Line 5) Three feelings the person has experienced

(Line 6) Three of the person's fears

(Line 7) Accomplishments (who composed . . . , who discovered . . . , etc.)

(Line 8) Two or three things the person wants to see happen or wants to do

(Line 9) His or her birthplace or home (born in...and living in...)

(Line 10) Last name (*required*)

### Bio-Poem Sample

Joe

Son of Mary and John Schmoe, brother of Mo

Handsome, quirky, goofy and intelligent

Who is scared of the dark, of monsters, and of not being taken seriously

Yearns to go skydiving, to travel to Brazil, to learn to speak Italian, to play for the Phillies,

and to invent the world's first space taxi

Who won second prize in last year's spelling bee and performed in three school plays

Loves his friends, his skateboard and his pet dog Snuffles

Born and raised in Brooklyn

Schmoe

### Sample Bio-Poem: Rosa Parks

Rosa

Determined, brave, strong, loving

Wife of Raymond Parks, mother of all children

Who loved equality, freedom, and the benefits of a good education

Who hated discrimination, loved to stand up for her beliefs, and loved to help others

Who feared that racism would continue, feared losing the opportunity to make a difference, and

feared that young people might lose opportunities to develop strength and courage

Who changed history as she accomplished great strides for equality and encouraged acceptance for all

Who wanted to see love triumph and see an end to all bias and discrimination in a world in which

respect is freely given to all

Born in Alabama and living in Detroit

Parks

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## Bio-Poem

**Directions: Typed or on loose-leaf, write a bio-poem using the format below.**

Write in 3rd person narrator (don't use "I"!)

Use 7-10 of the lines in the format.

You may rearrange the order of lines however you wish, but you must start the poem with your first name and end the poem with your last name.

Be creative and have fun with it!

### Bio-Poem Format

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(Line 3) Important relationship (daughter of . . . , mother of . . . , etc)

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Born and raised in Brooklyn

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## Day 6

On Day 6 of the activity, the concept of six-word memoirs is introduced as one that pushes students to carefully craft word choice and, in the process, carefully reflect on their own identity within a community of learners.

### PREPARATION REQUIRED

Student groupings for group practice activity  
Technology and Internet connection to access six-word memoirs on NPR's webpage NPR Six-Word Memoirs  
"Never really finished anything, except cake."  
–Carletta Perkins  
"Born in California. Then nothing happened." –Mark Harris  
"Asked to quiet down; spoke louder." –Wendy Lee  
"I still make coffee for two." –Zak Nelson

## Activities

### Individual work: Practice annotation

Students annotate the term "six-word memoir." This reflective task allows students to practice the annotation skills they have learning while reflecting on literary terms.

### Whole group: Introduce six-word memoir

Share the context of the original six-word memoir.  
(According to literary legend, novelist Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a short story in only six words. Hemingway's six-word story read: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn.").

Show webpage with six-word memoirs from NPR listeners.

Ask students: *What do you notice?* Share out and chart characteristics of the six-word memoir.

### Small groups: Write a six-word memoir

In groups, students write a six-word memoir for a fictional character (Harry Potter, Mickey Mouse, Willy Wonka, Sponge Bob, etc.).

### Individual work: Write self-reflective six-word memoirs

Students write their own six-word memoirs.



Having students write a six-word memoir as a group for a fictional character both affords students the opportunity to practice collaborating with their peers, and allows them to have some practice before writing their own memoir.

“It took a while to do the six-word memoir because, six words: you have your entire life to search through, it’s hard to go through eleven or twelve years.”  
– Sixth-Grader at Lab