

Pittsburgh Kids/Pittsburgh Writers:

A View from the Neighborhoods

By

Dr. Don Roberts

Pittsburgh Middle Gifted Center

If Pittsburgh were situated somewhere in the heart of Europe, tourists would eagerly journey hundreds of miles out of their way to visit it. Its setting is spectacular: between high bluffs, where the Monongahela River and the Allegheny River meet to form the Ohio. Driving in from the airport, one gains a first, startling glimpse of the city at the end of a highway tunnel through Mt. Washington: a conventionally pretty rural landscape suddenly gives way to the whole sweep of the city, with its bridges and skyscrapers. At the apex of what Pittsburghers have always called their Golden Triangle - an area of two hundred and fifty-odd acres of level bottomland that makes up the city's traditional downtown - are a grassy park and a fountain, which mark the site of the eighteenth century Fort Pitt.

¹Brendan Gill

*It is in many ways an incomparably beautiful city. Houses spill in clusters over tree-covered hills or nestle into hollows, their backs to the hillside. Countless creeks, or "runs," carve serpentine paths toward the valley floor and the three rivers that form the city's core. More than four hundred bridges span rivers, hollows, and runs.*²Laurie Graham

Literary Snapshots of the City

Pittsburgh writers react in a personal way to the city, and I am no different. Although not a native Pittsburgher, I have considered Pittsburgh my city for the past thirty plus years. I proudly show off the city to visiting friends and relatives who marvel at the entrance seen at night from the Fort Pitt Bridge, or the view from Mount Washington, or the distinctly ethnic neighborhoods scattered around the town. My Pittsburgh experience started at the University of Pittsburgh and continued as a teacher in six public schools located in the South Side, the East-Central section, and the West End. I came to appreciate the significance of the ethnic composition of the city when I researched and wrote a curriculum unit, "Ethnic Pittsburgh" several years ago. This year the seminar, Pittsburgh Writers, attracted my attention. I knew that I still had much to learn about the city and the literary approach would add another dimension. The three Pittsburgh writers quoted below all add something unique to the expandable definition of Pittsburgh; they cut another facet into the gem.

Everybody I met in Pittsburgh was from Pittsburgh, or some small town outside it. Pittsburgh often calls itself "a big small town." It has an Old World sort of integrity. There are streetcars, cobbled streets and in-numerable public bars, not to mention the national headquarters of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Italian Sons and Daughters of America, Polish Falcons of America, the Serbian National Federation, the National Slovak Society of the United States of America and the Ukrainian National Aid Association of America.³Roy Blount, Jr.

To an outsider Pittsburgh must seem all bridges, tunnels, rivers, and hills. If you're not climbing into the sky or burrowing into the bowels of the earth, you're suspended, crossing water or looking down on a hodgepodge scramble of houses strewn up and down the sides of a ravine. You'd wonder how people live clinging to terraced hillsides. Why they trust ancient, doddering bridges to ferry them over the void. Why they truck along, at seventy miles an hour on a narrow shelf chiseled in the stone shoulders of a mountain.⁴John Wideman

What I love about Pittsburgh is that it has not moved back into this state of complete sell-out. Pittsburgh's past is proof alone that at one time the city was a simple appendage for industry, but the great exodus of the steel industry from Pittsburgh saved its culture by freeing it from corporate chains. Pittsburgh is not as trendy, cool, hip or rich as Schaumburg, and that is the greatest compliment a city can receive. ⁵ Joe Block

Historic Pittsburgh

The unique amalgam of contemporary Pittsburgh was created from an old American frontier town of the mid-1700's made relatively secure by the defeat of nearby tribes at the Battle of Bushy Run in neighboring Westmoreland County. Pontiac's Conspiracy, a union of Native American tribes along the north-south stretch of the Appalachians and westward, had terrorized the British frontier until Chief Pontiac and his allies were forced to accept the defeat of the French and the ascendancy of the British at this battle in 1763.

The small cluster of buildings situated around Fort Pitt was located on a point of land where two rivers merged to form the Ohio River. The "Gateway to the West" city was born. Cheap transportation was needed and what could be better than floating down the river to Pittsburgh, gathering provisions, and then heading down the Ohio to the Mississippi River and points westward. Serious growth began. The location on the three rivers also made Pittsburgh an ideal place to manufacture industrial products. Raw materials such as coal, coal, and iron ore could be brought in by cheap water transportation, and manufactured goods could be sent on their way to customers. The steady influx from western Europe in the early years, primarily the Scot-Irish, had peopled the frontier region on small farms. Now, as industry expanded, mill workers were needed.

Rapid growth followed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The burgeoning population now came primarily from eastern and southern Europe as well as the rural American South. They came to work in the factories and mills of the Steel City, and established themselves in ethnic neighborhoods.

Sitting astride its hills and snuggled in its valleys are a chain of ethnic neighborhoods created and preserved by the streams and gullies (Pittsburgh calls them "runs" and hollows") that form their natural boundaries. There is a substantial Arab community in Oakland, Slavs, Ukrainians, and Russians still predominate on the South Side; Italians on Mt. Washington, and in Manchester; Germans on Troy Hill and Spring Hill; the Polish on Polish Hill; Jews and Episcopalians in Squirrel Hill, and the founding Scotch-Irish in the heavily forested suburbs of Fox Chapel and Sewickley Heights. ⁶ Franklin Toker

In the twenty years between 1910 and 1930, the black population of Pittsburgh increased by nearly fifty thousand. Black music, blues, and jazz, came to town in places like the Pythian Temple, the Ritz, the Savoy, the Showboat. In the bars on the North Side, Homewood, and the Hill you could get whatever you thought you wanted. Gambling, women, a good pork chop. ⁷ John Wideman

The advent of the iron and steel industry was, in reality, a mixed blessing. It brought prosperity to a few mill owners and stockholders, and dangerous employment to the masses that toiled in the factories. Pittsburgh became known for its foul air. Rebecca Harding, a 19th century visitor, had an unflattering description of the urban environment.

The idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke. It rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets. Smoke on the wharves, smoke on the dingy boats, on the yellow river,--clinging in a coating of greasy soot to the house front, the two faded poplars, the faces of the passers-by. ⁸ Rebecca Harding

Charles Dickens, traveling in America in the same time period, had a somewhat mixed reaction to the city. He wrote:

Pittsburgh is like Birmingham in England; at least, its townspeople say so. Setting aside the streets, the shops, the houses, wagons, factories, public buildings, and population, perhaps it may be. It certainly has a quantity of smoke

hanging about it, and is famous for its ironworks. Besides the prison to which I have already referred, this town contains a pretty arsenal and other institutions. It is very beautifully situated on the Allegheny River, over which there are two bridges; and the villas of the wealthier citizens, sprinkled about the high grounds in the neighborhoods, are pretty enough.⁹ Charles Dickens

James Parton, writing in the Atlantic Monthly in 1868, less charitably summed up Pittsburgh with the famous quote that it was, "Hell with the lid taken off."¹⁰ During Pittsburgh's heyday as an industrial giant, a foreign visitor, Warren Tryon, made this scathing observation about the city. "If a sheet of white paper lie upon your desk half an hour, you may write on it with your finger's end, through the thin stratum of coal dust that has settled upon it during the interval."¹¹ Some sixty years later, H.L. Mencken wrote, "One expects steel towns to be dirty. What I allude to is the unbroken, agonizing ugliness, the sheer revolting monstrousness of every house in sight."¹²

Into this industrial behemoth, the workers came, attracted by the promise of wages and a chance to better themselves. At first they moved into company housing or became boarders in cheap rooming houses run by others who spoke the same language, and shared a subculture. Eventually, these enclaves expanded into full-blown ethnic neighborhoods, such as Polish Hill, Bloomfield, and the South Side.

Each neighborhood is unique. Some are particularly characteristic. The narrow, gable-roofed houses of working people climb the South Side slopes of the Monongahela densely, in jumbled rows, above the turn-of-the-century commercial buildings and row houses of the South Side flats and the expanse of empty land that was once part of the Pittsburgh Works of Jones & Laughlin Steel. Perched on the hillside, they call to mind an Italian hill town, holding perpendicular against the plunging angle of the hill. With the mills closed down, their faces glow white in the sunlight above the red brick of the flats.

In neighborhoods more removed from the rivers, long lines of solid brick houses with sturdy brick porches look out on precipitously sloping front lawns. The slope is accented, house after house, by concrete steps leading from porch to sidewalk.¹³ Laurie Graham

Change is a constant and Pittsburgh is urban proof of that. An energetic mayor, David L. Lawrence, in the early 1950's energized the corporate leaders to support a bold initiative, and the Pittsburgh Renaissance was born. Buildings were razed, and skyscrapers pierced the sky. Pollution controls became standard, and the air inversion alerts became increasingly rare. The 1970's and 1980's saw even more change as the steel industry contracted. The dominance of the steel mills and blast furnaces in Pittsburgh was over.

We lived in a clean city whose center was new; after the war, a few business leaders and Democratic Mayor David L. Lawrence had begun cleaning it up. Beneath the new city, and tucked up its alleys, lay the old Pittsburgh, and the old foothill land beneath it. It was all old if you dig far enough. Our Pittsburgh was like Rome, or Jericho, a palimpsest, a sliding pile of cities built ever nearer the sky, and rising ever higher over the rivers. If you dug, you found things.¹⁴ Annie Dillard

Not everyone who looked at the haze over the city prior to the Pittsburgh Renaissance saw only smoke. Franklin Toker in 1986 saw much more. In fact, he detected an urban personality.

The chief distinction of Pittsburgh is not smoke, and it never was. There has been no major smoke for thirty years, and even when smoke hung thick over the city for a century it was accepted stoically and almost affectionately as the life-sign of its prosperity. Instead, the chief distinction of Pittsburgh is work. As surely as Paris represents glamour, Dallas wealth, and Rome the *dolce vita*, so Pittsburgh stands for industry and production. Always fairly small (its current population is about 400,000, with a metropolitan region of 2.4 million), Pittsburgh is the classic overachiever among American cities.¹⁵ Franklin Toker

Rationale

"Pittsburgh Kids/Pittsburgh Writers: A View from the Neighborhoods" is the title I chose for this curriculum unit created for the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute seminar, "Pittsburgh Writers." I selected this title because of initial

confusion over what a Pittsburgh writer is. Obviously the course is about people who write about the city, but can that definition be made more precise? Is it anyone who just writes about the city, past or present? Could it be anyone who writes about things experienced while living in Pittsburgh? Perhaps, the definition should be limited to writers such as Annie Dillard, August Wilson, and John Wideman who have published stories set in Pittsburgh neighborhoods and authenticated them by mentioning many streets, public buildings, parks, rivers and hills.

Actually, that definition may be too limiting. Pittsburghers have a story to tell that is both an urban tale and an individual story rooted in the personal experiences of life in the neighborhoods. Thousands of public school children have a viewpoint influenced by their neighborhood and city. These potential Pittsburgh writers have stories to tell that may be shaped and influenced by neighborhood and city experiences. This curriculum unit will consider Pittsburgh kids as Pittsburgh writers who have something to say about their lives and something to learn from role models, the published Pittsburgh writers quoted throughout this curriculum.

A person who wants to be a serious writer is often told to write about what he/she knows best. This good advice will be the basis of what is attempted in "Pittsburgh Kids/Pittsburgh Writers." Children usually know their immediate neighborhood in terms of where they live and where they go on a daily basis. They need to know more to write knowledgeably about their lives in both the city and its neighborhoods.

If they come to view their home territory as a place with a past, it is possible they will look at things differently. If they become aware of more than their small part of a neighborhood, they will have a larger viewpoint, a greater perspective. If a student lives in a recently created or expanded neighborhood, there is also value in knowing that the life of a city is an on-going process of growth and change. If children see their urban environment as a place with a future, that confidence will help shape what they feel and may ultimately write.

This curriculum unit will help Pittsburgh students become knowledgeable Pittsburgh writers by providing opportunities for them to learn about the city through Social Studies activities. Then, they will use the basic facts they have learned about their city and its neighborhoods in a wide variety of creative writing assignments. It should be noted that there are fifteen quotes from professional Pittsburgh writers imbedded in the text of this curriculum. They may be used as literary prompts for writing assignments. The overall goal of "Pittsburgh Kids/Pittsburgh Writers" is to make students more aware of where they live and, in the process, to give them material to use when they write stories set in their own neighborhoods and the city at large.

Learning About the City and Its Neighborhoods

Before students focus directly upon their own neighborhoods they should consider Pittsburgh as the city once called the "Gateway to the West." There are several books on the city that could be used to extract a concise history of the city. The Kenneth Roberts novels and Walter O'Meara's Guns at the Forks are particularly valuable. The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania publishes pamphlets that could be used. Students could use them to look up answers to teacher prepared questions. There are videos of Pittsburgh landmarks that are available at Carnegie libraries as well as local video stores. The web site <http://wqed.org/erc/teachers/resources.html> contains teacher ready lessons that can be used along with these videos. Standards based curriculum materials are aggregated at PBS TeacherSource. These could be viewed and used as a source of information about the city, past and present. Maps of the city streets, geographic features, and public buildings are available from the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society as well as the Pittsburgh Visitors and Convention Bureau and the Heinz History Center.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools are now entering the final phase of a massive introduction of computers into the classrooms. In the coming year, 2000-2001, all classrooms should be equipped to use computers for research. Individual teachers who use this curriculum must decide what they want their students to concentrate upon when they enter the two web sites cited below. The possibilities are tremendous for students who are researching the city and its neighborhoods. For example, students could be required to go on a fact-finding mission for a neighborhood, or several neighborhoods in a geographic section of the city. Notes taken, and materials downloaded, could become an oral and/or written report. Committees could be formed within the class to cover the neighborhoods, or a representative sample of neighborhoods, in each of the four geographic sections of the city. Specific neighborhoods could be recreated by cooperative work groups of students who could draw maps of the neighborhoods, complete

with streets and businesses, on large pieces of kraft paper. These could be done as murals and used as backdrops during presentations of writing projects. Information collected here also could be used to supplement the written assignments given elsewhere in this curriculum unit.

Social Studies activities that may be used in this unit will rely heavily upon the Pittsburgh home page (www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/maps/html). Students' assignments may include using published maps to label blank maps, and to follow directions to go from one point to another while recording the names and locations of streets, parks, and public buildings. The maps listed at the Pittsburgh home page may be used "as is" or modified as needed. The variety of potential lessons that can be created from this source are apparent from the topics listed: Highways to Pittsburgh, Downtown Pittsburgh, Neighborhoods, Council Districts, Wards/Voting Districts, Neighborhoods and zip codes. For example, you will find that the Downtown Pittsburgh maps give the names and locations of city buildings. Clicking on the building or building number opens up a photo of the building and a listing of the city departments it contains. The maps of Pittsburgh neighborhoods, surrounding suburbs and townships published by various municipalities can be used for a similar purpose: to help make students knowledgeable about their neighborhood, other neighborhoods, the city at large and adjacent suburbs.

Another web site to use is www.realpittsburgh.com/community. Once you open this web site you should go to Best Pittsburgh Sites and Select Neighborhoods. Under the category Local Web Directory, select Communities Online, and Local Neighborhoods - Pittsburgh. The eighty-eight Pittsburgh neighborhoods plus surrounding suburbs all have several categories of information: neighborhood news, a virtual tour, photo galleries, demographics, municipal contracts and local resources. Clicking on Area Neighborhoods - Pittsburgh reveals information on the city neighborhoods as well as suburbs divided directionally into Neighborhoods North, South, East and West.

Writing About the City and Its Neighborhoods

The purpose of the creative writing activities in this curriculum unit would be to combine newly acquired knowledge of the city and its neighborhoods with specific assignments. The teacher could either require completion of all writing assignments or give students the opportunity to choose a specific number of these assignments. These assignments also should be viewed as an opportunity for students to learn from each other. Some of the assignments could be group research projects with team members brainstorming ideas in prewriting activities, sharing their work while doing the research, and pooling their collective talents to write up the results, and, in some cases, presenting it to the class. Teachers might want to begin an on-going portfolio of the work presented. This portfolio could be the beginning of a student written history of the city and its neighborhoods that is kept in the school. Supplements could be added to the portfolio each year this research and writing project is used. That way the second year a class could start with the file on the South Side or the Point. The students would be creating an on-going record of life in the city neighborhoods that would probably be of value to future historians of the city.

The following ten writing assignments, other than the first one, are in no particular order. They are:

- write a 300 word description of the city and a 200 word description of one neighborhood
- create a folk hero, past or present, for the city or a particular neighborhood;
- write a biography of a famous resident of the city or a neighborhood;
- interview someone in your neighborhood and record what was said about what life was like in the neighborhood when that person was a child;
- interview a relative on the same topic and then complete an essay beginning with these words, "My (Dad, Mom, Grandpa, Grandma) remembers when...";
- complete an essay beginning with these words, "I remember when...";
- write a mystery that uses neighborhood locations as well as locations throughout the city;
- create a brochure designed to entice tourists to visit Pittsburgh;
- create a class presentation for neighborhood pride (a poster, an historical summary, a description of the neighborhood, today and in the past); and
- do research on well known Pittsburgh writers (perhaps, Dillard, Wideman, and Wilson), write biographical sketches of their lives, and summarize their literary works.

All of these assignments should be done using the appropriate worksheets in the appendix.

The Rules of the Road

The student written descriptions of the city could be introduced with a brainstorming activity. The teacher would ask the class for words that describe or identify the city. For example, students might say, hilly, potholes, PAT buses, the Pittsburgh Zoo, old school buildings, hot summers, the Incline, the Regatta, Point Park, the three rivers, PNC Park, the Penguins, the Steelers, the Pirates, the Carnegie Science Center, Kennywood, fall foliage, etc. The teacher would write these on the board without comment. Then, the students would be asked to add some more descriptive words to their own personal list of Pittsburgh descriptors. The teacher might have the students create a web of ideas or any other prewriting activity. Then, the assignment would be to write their essay describing the city. This would be followed by an assignment to do some prewriting about a neighborhood, preferably their own, and an essay. During the introduction to this activity or at its conclusion, the teacher could use some descriptions of the city and selected neighborhoods by professional Pittsburgh writers. There are many passages that could be used from Annie Dillard (Point Breeze), John Wideman (Homewood), and August Wilson (the Hill District). The Descriptive Worksheet that goes with this activity may be found in Appendix A.

The folk hero writing activity should be introduced by reading the well-known story of Joe Magarac, the Croatian American steelworker and Pittsburgh folk hero, (Joe Magarac and His U.S.A. Citizens Papers). His life and exploits will serve as an example of how a fictional folk hero can be created to emphasize the salient characteristics of a particular time and place as well as a subculture and society at large. Also, his story highlights Pittsburgh's past as the steel capital of the world. Students need to know that fictional folk heroes also can be the creative expression of issues in contemporary life. Joe's story was of a hard working immigrant who wanted to become an American citizen. That appealed to a previous generation who shared his hardships, aspirations and background. Current students will need to look around them to identify a modern day subject for a folk hero. Would it be Michael Microchipski, the computer geek at Carnegie Mellon who creates the ultimate robot? Could Micky Microchip, his alter ego, be that robot? Could it be a character in a video game who comes to life and solves the problems that plague the city and its neighborhoods? Perhaps to stimulate thinking, there needs to be a discussion of what constitutes a hero and a role model for Pittsburghers. See the Tall Tale/Folk Hero Worksheet in Appendix B.

When students begin this study of Pittsburgh and its neighborhoods, they probably would not know the names of famous Pittsburghers from the past. They may not know the names of famous contemporary Americans who once lived in Pittsburgh. The first thing to do is to compile a list. The teacher should contact the Heinz History Center and the Carnegie Library to get a list of historical names. It would include artists like Mary Cassatt, writers such as Willa Cather, politicians, for example David Lawrence, industrialists (the long list could begin with Andrew Carnegie), musicians, like Stephen Foster, athletes as recent as Roberto Clemente, and so on. Students may know the names of current entertainment industry personalities to add to the list. Once a list is compiled, students would make their choice of subject and begin their research. The Internet would be one place to go for information. The biography should include basic information, but also might include a map of the city showing where the person lived. If the teacher would like to start the list with about twenty names, consult the Biography Worksheet in Appendix C. The biography could be presented to the class as a written report, or it could be a more creative presentation with one student interviewing the historical personality, and the other person impersonating the character. See the Biography Worksheet for a suggested activity.

The two oral history type assignments (#4, interviewing an older neighborhood resident, and #5, interviewing an older relative) provide the opportunity for the entire class to learn about a neighborhood's past from someone who lived it. The student should go into the interview fully prepared with a list of appropriate questions. Those questions should be compiled with one thing in mind: what do I need to ask to find out what life was like in the neighborhood a long time ago? The oral interviews should, if possible, be tape-recorded. Once recorded, the student could use this assignment as an opportunity to exercise the higher level thinking skills of synthesizing, and evaluating when summarizing the highlights of the interview in a written report. Also, "a picture is worth a thousand words," so asking to see old pictures of the neighborhood could bring forth interesting dialogue. The sixth assignment ("I remember when..." is an opportunity for a student to be introspective about the changes he/she has seen during their childhood. The questions listed in the Oral History Worksheet (Appendix D) could be used to spur thinking for this assignment as well.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, in partnership with several prestigious organizations, has a nationwide initiative entitled, "My History is America's History." Specifically, this project outlines 15 things that can be done to save America's stories. It is an ideal source to consult when doing any oral history projects. The web site is www.myhistory.org

The "write a mystery," assignment #7, would probably work best as an optional exercise for students who like reading mysteries. The "whodunit" must be a Pittsburgh based story that accurately mentions place locations within the city. The possibilities are listed as possible story line (scenario prompts) in the Pittsburgh Mystery Worksheet in the Appendix E.

Writing assignments # 8 and 9 have some things in common. Both would be an opportunity to promote the city and/or its neighborhoods. Also, both would combine an artistic presentation with basic facts gained from research. The Pittsburgh tourist brochure and the Neighborhood Pride presentation would direct student attention to finding positive things to write, draw, or say about our city. See the directions for these assignments in the Pittsburgh Promotional Handout in Appendix E.

The tenth writing assignment involves doing research on a well-known Pittsburgh writer. Students who do this assignment will need a list of Pittsburgh writers to choose from, and then they will need access to a selection of their works. Writers listed in this curriculum bibliography may be used. The teacher should help students make selections that are grade and age appropriate and then direct them to the sources. If many students do this assignment, the teacher could arrange to have a Pittsburgh Writers Day and have several students make presentations that day.

Content Standards Addressed

The Core Curriculum Frameworks, used by Pittsburgh teachers as they create lessons, are divided into nine broad areas of content standards. Three of those areas (Communications, Arts and Humanities, and Citizenship) are directly tied to the Pittsburgh Kids/Pittsburgh Writers curriculum. Since students are to use Social Studies activities to learn more about Pittsburgh and its neighborhoods, the Citizenship Content Standards apply. Because they are to research and read published Pittsburgh writers, the Arts and Humanities Content Standards also are applicable. After learning more about Pittsburgh and its published writers, the students use their recently acquired knowledge plus creativity to become Pittsburgh writers themselves (Communications Standards). Appendix H contains a list of the specific content standards within each of these three groupings which are tied to activities within this curriculum unit.

Final Thoughts

The Pittsburgh Teachers Institute seminar, "Pittsburgh Writers" has exposed me to what has been professionally written about living in the city and its neighborhoods, past and present. Selected passages from The Spencers of Amberson Avenue (Ethel Spencer), The Valley of Decision (Marcia Davenport), and Out of This Furnace (Thomas Bell) will give students a chance to look at Pittsburgh when it was, in reality, another time and another place. Excerpts from Dillard, Wilson, Wideman and others will give students a more contemporary perspective of the urban experience. Students hopefully will come to realize that what the city and its neighborhoods meant to all of these writers was highly personal, just as it is to each Pittsburgher today.

This curriculum unit has been written to accommodate the typical teaching situation of the Social Studies and Language Arts teachers in the city schools. It should be noted that I teach at the Pittsburgh Middle Gifted Center which is a unique educational facility. For example, at the Middle Gifted Center, the students cannot be given homework assignments, and meet for one hour classes, once a week. Also, they choose which classes they will take. For example, the oral history interview that leads to a written report to the class could be a homework assignment in other schools, but would have to be done in class at my school. I would invite some parents into the classroom to be interviewed. While this could be done in other schools, the teacher there has the option of having all students interview relatives and neighbors, a much larger pool of people to interview. Also, it should be noted that this curriculum could be a separate distinct unit of work covering approximately three weeks of class time, or it could be

integrated into an existing Social Studies or Language Arts class with one class a week devoted to Pittsburgh writers.

End Notes

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North Side Story, WQED (Pittsburgh)

South Side, WQED (Pittsburgh)

Downtown Pittsburgh, WQED (Pittsburgh)

The Strip Show, WQED (Pittsburgh)

Kennywood Memories, WQED (Pittsburgh)

Holy Pittsburgh, WQED (Pittsburgh)

Pittsburgh's Greatest Sports Heroes, WQED (Pittsburgh)

Websites

www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/maps/html

www.realpittsburgh.com/community

<http://wqed.org/erc/teachers/resources.html>

www.myhistory.org

Appendix A

Descriptive Worksheet (Pittsburgh and Its Neighborhood)

Directions: You will do some prewriting before you begin writing your 300 word description of the city and the 200 word description of a city neighborhood. Do the following:

Write at least 15 adjectives that describe Pittsburgh. You may use some of the words that the teacher writes on the board as your class brainstorms descriptors of the city.

_____ , _____ , _____ ,
_____ , _____ , _____ ,
_____ , _____ , _____ ,
_____ , _____ , _____ ,
_____ , _____ , _____ ,

. Use one of these adjectives to create a pre-writing web. A web is where you take an idea (a word from the brainstorming), and add related ideas (words) to it without needing to worry about writing a perfect copy of the assignment.

For example, Pittsburgh is hilly. Draw a circle and write Pittsburgh in the center.

. Leave enough room outside the circle to draw some straight lines coming out from the circle.

. On one of the straight lines write "hilly."

. Now add descriptive words or phrases such as, "dangerous in winter, fun to skateboard, beautiful," etc.

. Add PAT buses on another line and write some words and phrases to describe them such as convenient, crowded, etc.

. Now pick any five words that describe Pittsburgh, and create a web for each one. Do it in the space below.

. Now start your 300 word essay with these words, "Pittsburgh is...

. Use this activity to prepare for your 200 word essay on your neighborhood

Appendix B

Tall Tale/Folk Hero Worksheet

Directions: A tall tale is an exaggerated story about someone with amazing skills and strengths that could do, and often did, extraordinary things. A hero is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "a mythological or legendary figure of great strength; a man/woman admired for achievement and qualities." A folk hero is able to right the wrongs suffered by ordinary people. One example of a tall tale from western Pennsylvania about an imaginary folk hero is the story of "Cherry Tree Joe".

His appetite was enormous, and the frying pan she (his wife) cooked in was so big it took a side of bacon to grease it. When Joe got restless, he skated off down the Allegheny with a log raft strapped to each foot. The image of Joe with rafts on his feet no doubt arose from his real-life expertise as a lumberman, running logs and rafts on the Upper Allegheny.

Laurie Graham, Singing the City, p.32.

When Cherry Tree Joe did things that helped people solve their problems, he became the folk hero of a tall tale.

In this writing exercise create a tall tale with a folk hero from Pittsburgh.

You first have to think of things in Pittsburgh that could/ should be better than they are. Then, you have to create someone to do the job.

List some things that would make our city (or neighborhood) better. For example, abandoned buildings should be replaced, the rivers cleaned of pollution, parks created to line the river banks, homeless people given permanent shelter, etc.

From a teen-agers viewpoint list some other things that could/should be improved. Should there be, for example, more after- school recreation? Anything else?

Next, narrow down your choices of things to improve. What would you have your folk hero do to make life better in your city or neighborhood?

Now, focus your thoughts on the type of folk hero that you want for your

city or neighborhood. Think of categories of possible heroes. For example, it could be a sports figure, a computer genius, a singer or musical group, a scientist, a medical doctor, a _____, _____, or a _____.

Now, visualize your folk hero. What does he/she look like? Describe him/her. _____

What special characteristics does he/she have?

Name your folk hero. _____

Now, start your tall tale about your Pittsburgh folk hero.

Appendix C

Biography Worksheet

. Select a famous Pittsburgher to write about. See the list below. Then, find information in the library or on the Internet.

. Now, work with a partner to create an interview skit.

. You can place your interview anywhere you want. For example, it could be a television or radio interview done locally or nationally. You could play the part of someone famous doing the interview like Barbara Walters, Dan Rather, Oprah Winfrey, or Terry Bradshaw.

You will need to ask the ten questions listed below plus five others.

A). When and where were you born?

- B). Do you have any brothers or sisters? Who are they?
- C). Please give me a brief description of your parents.
- D). Did you ever marry? If so, to whom?
- E). Please describe one important incident in your childhood that influenced your later life.
- F). Please describe something you are famous for doing.
- G). Please describe someone who influenced your life.
- H). Tell me about a Pittsburgh memory.
- I). What might people be surprised to know about you?
- J). What are you proudest of in your life?
- K). _____
- L). _____
- M). _____
- N). _____
- O). _____

Some famous Pittsburghers: Andrew Carnegie, Rachel Carson, Mary Cassatt, Willa Cather, Roberto Clemente, Stephen Foster, Henry Clay Frick, Martha Graham, George S. Kaufman, Michael Keaton, Gene Kelly, David Lawrence, Mario Lemieux, Dan Marino, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Fred Rogers, John Augustus Roebling, Jonas Salk, Honus Wagner, Andy Warhol, George Westinghouse and MaryLou Williams. You may add to the list.

Appendix D

Oral History Worksheet

Directions: This worksheet may be used with writing assignments # 4 and #5 (oral history interviews) as well as adapted for use with assignment # 6 (a personal narrative).

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

- A. When and where were you born?
- B. Where did you first live in Pittsburgh (which neighborhood)?
- C. Describe the neighborhood of your childhood, how it changed during your lifetime.

- D. Which schools did you go to in Pittsburgh (elementary and secondary)?
- E. What were schools like then? Did students get paddled? Were teachers different?
- F. Where did most people in the neighborhood work? Did kids work, too?
- G. Do you remember any big events in the neighborhood, like parades on the Fourth of July, visiting politicians, celebrations to mark the end of a war?
- H. Were there any big buildings that are no longer there?
- I. What kind of stores were there in the neighborhood when you were a child?
- J. Do you think it is a better neighborhood today, or when you were growing up?

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

If you do this assignment (# 6), you are to think about the changes you have witnessed in your city and/or neighborhood during your life-time. Then, make a list of those changes (brainstorm), do a rough draft, and make a final copy. You should do more than just list the changes you have seen. Think about what these changes probably will mean to the future of your neighborhood/city. You might even want to predict what your neighborhood will look like in 25 or 50 years.

Appendix E

Pittsburgh Mystery Worksheet

Directions: This is an optional assignment for students who like to read mysteries. The only difference here is that you will set your mystery story locally within the city of Pittsburgh. The following are the rules of the road for writing your Pittsburgh mystery.

1. Decide upon a basic story line and make it have a Pittsburgh connection. For example, it could be: What happened to Mrs. Mellon's Diamonds?; Who stole the secret receipt for Heinz's Ketchup; What is behind the bizarre escapades of CMU's most promising robot?; Why did the Steelers, Pirates and Penguins all get involved in a game fixing scheme during the same year and who is behind it all?; or... . List some other possibilities.

2. You must have at least five characters. What will you call your detective?

3. Decide where the story takes place within the city. You must mention at least one of the three rivers, two bridges, and three public buildings, Also, you need to name some well known locations within the city such as Mt. Washington, the South Side, Oakland, etc. as well as one or more school or university. Where will the crime take place? _____

4. Name several streets, avenues, and/or boulevards that will be in your story.

5. You can give the solution to your mystery within the story or ask your classmates to try to solve it with the clues you provide.

Appendix F

Pittsburgh Promotional Worksheet

Directions: This worksheet is to be used with either writing assignment # 8 or # 9. In both of these assignments you are asked to identify things that are positive about your city and/or neighborhoods.

The Pittsburgh Brochure:

Think about all the positive images that visitors to Pittsburgh have: the day time view from Mt. Washington; the night time view from the Fort Pitt Bridge; the dazzling skyscrapers downtown; the fountain at the Point; the dinosaurs at the Carnegie Museum; the Carnegie Science Center; the sports teams; the zoo, and the....

Now, create a brochure to encourage tourists to visit our city. Take a large piece of plain paper and fold it into three equal parts. Each section should have words and drawings that highlight positive things about Pittsburgh. You decide what you want to write and draw. A logo for the city would be nice. So would a map. Jot down your ideas below.

Neighborhood Pride:

Each neighborhood has special things about it. Your job is to identify those things and then present them to your class. One way to do it is in a poster. First brainstorm some ideas about what to put on the poster. You might want to work with others in your class who are from the same neighborhood. Make a preliminary drawing that includes your drawings of things that identify your neighborhood today. If you want, you could include some of your neighborhood's history. For example, if many immigrants once lived in your neighborhood and worked in a nearby factory, illustrate that. Do some research using the Pittsburgh web sites that are cited in the bibliography. Each poster could be presented to the class during a neighborhood pride day. Jot down your ideas below.

Appendix G

Professional Pittsburgh Worksheet

Below you will find a list of professional writers who lived in Pittsburgh for a period of time, and/or wrote stories that used Pittsburgh as a location. This list of writers may be expanded to include others. It should be noted that the list includes writers of fiction, nonfiction, and poets as well as historians and other astute observers of the cultural scene. Also, students should consult the bibliography to get citations of works that have a Pittsburgh theme.

Robert C. Alberts, Leland Baldwin, Thomas Bell, Jan Beatty, Roy Blount, Jr., James Howard Bridge, Margaret F. Byington, Andrew Carnegie, Willa Cather, Michael Chabon, Myron Cope, Gerald Costanzo, Jim Daniels, Marcia Davenport, Frank Deford, David Demarest, Jr., Annie Dillard, Lynn Emanuel, Albert French, Laurie Graham, Donald Hall, Haniel Long, Judith Modell, Walter O'Meara, Rob Ruck, Gladys Schmitt, William Serrin, George Seldes, Ailon Shiloh, Arthur G. Smith, Ethel Spencer, Franklin Toker, James D. Van Trump, Michael Weber, John Edgar Wideman and August Wilson

Write the names of three Pittsburgh writers that you may want to use along with the title of their literary works on Pittsburgh.

Now, use the Internet (Yahoo or other search engines) to do a search to find basic biographical information, and the school library to locate the appropriate book and/or articles. Inter-school library services may be needed.

After you have read the relevant material, and taken notes, decide how you want to present your information to the class. It could be in the form of a traditional book report, but it could have some creative touches. One possibility is to make a large drawing of what life was like in Pittsburgh when your writer (Thomas Bell, for example) was describing the lives of immigrants working in the steel mills. You could work with a partner and write a skit adapted from a passage in the book you are reading. You could pretend to be the author of the book being interviewed for a newspaper story. Put your thoughts in the space below.

Appendix H

Pittsburgh Public School Content Standards

Arts and Humanities Standards:

- . All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand the important features of the works. (Number 2)
- . All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created. (Number 3)

When students respond in writing to the literary prompts found in the first two sections of this curriculum, they are responding critically to the literature produced by the published Pittsburgh writers, AH 2. When they relate the prompts to the historical context of Pittsburgh's past and its evolution as the Steel City they are making a literary connection, AH 3

Citizenship Standards:

- . All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations, and describe themes and patterns of historical development. (Number 1)
- . All students demonstrate understanding of themes and patterns of geography, know the location of major bodies of water, landmasses and nations, and describe the relationships between geography and historical economic and cultural developments. (Number 2)
- . All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences. (Number 4)

All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others. (Number 7)

All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others. (Number 8)

When students research the history of the city or one of its neighborhoods in library books from the bibliography or at one of the web sites listed, they are uncovering the pattern of historical development of Pittsburgh. When they engage in one of the oral history activities, again they are looking at the historical development of a community from the viewpoint of its residents, C1. When students make connections between the geographic setting of Pittsburgh and the economic development of an industrial city, they are exploring historic, economic and cultural development, C2. Some students will create a tall tale set in Pittsburgh with an imaginary folk hero. To complete this assignment, they must identify Pittsburgh problems in need of a solution, C4. Students who choose to work in a cooperative group when completing projects must communicate, negotiate and cooperate with others so the group can be effective, C7 and 8.

Communications Standards:

. All students write for a variety of purposes, including: to narrate, inform, and persuade in all subject areas. (Number 4)

. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications. (Number 6)

. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe. (Number 8)

When students orally brainstorm ideas to use in any of the ten writing activities, or work within a group, they are addressing CO 6. When they research a topic such as their neighborhood and then write an informative essay, they are meeting CO Standard 4. When they prepare and make an oral presentation promoting the city or one of the neighborhoods, they are carrying out CO 8.