

Pittsburgh Stories: a Collection of Historical Fiction

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Introduction

Literature unleashes lessons of history and of human nature. It brings eras long past to life. It takes us on a journey into the future. It challenges us to ponder our own predicaments and idiosyncrasies and to search for insights into the human condition. The power of a piece of literature often depends on the genre through which the message travels. A poem may spark the same curiosity and scrutiny as an abstract painting. A science fiction story may take the reader on a flight of fancy. A biography may open one's eyes to personal possibilities never before considered. An essay may define a complicated issue that the reader was previously unable to comprehend. News articles may give the reader the exact information that he or she needs at the moment. All teachers use literature to teach lessons, but English teachers in particular use literature as a springboard for teaching about life and about writing. We design reading, writing, speaking and listening activities that incorporate all genres of literature.

One genre that always seems to grab the students' attention is the short story. Students love to hear or read a great story. They seem to soak up the information that the tale conveys and then they want more. I have often

had a difficult time remembering historical facts and events. Indeed, I usually found my history courses to be boring until I had a teacher who presented the information through captivating stories. I am sure that some of my students also become bored with lectures and readings that are heavy with historical details. Perhaps approaching such material through the story format will not only help them learn new information, but will also pique their interest in acquiring the skills necessary to write exciting pieces. Pittsburgh history offers the ingredients for such captivating stories. Therefore, I hope to get my students hooked on producing rich works of historical fiction that give them a chance to demonstrate their creative abilities as well as their knowledge of historical facts about Pittsburgh.

Target Group

This short-story-writing unit is designed for a ninth grade gifted class of fifteen students, but certainly it can be adapted for any grade level. This unit will be presented during the second semester so that students can gain experience with prerequisite skills during the first semester. During the first semester students will be exposed to many elements of fiction. They will learn; the power of effective characterization, creating "real" people by addressing appearance, speech, actions, inner thoughts and feelings and others' attitudes towards the character; the power of setting, details that make time and place come to life; the power of plot, weaving a tale that creates suspense through complication of events; the power of point of view that permits the writer to see the events through one character's eyes or to report events as an outside observer; and the power of imagery, selecting words that create sound and movement that carry the reader into the literary world the story has created. Students will practice all of these techniques throughout the first semester.

Objectives and Strategies

Overview

The purpose of this unit is to motivate students to learn interesting facts about Pittsburgh history and then use these facts to write memorable short stories in the historical fiction genre. Heavy emphasis will be placed on researching the early history of Pittsburgh. Additional emphasis will be on how students craft their stories. The discussion of deep intellectual themes behind the stories will be secondary. I want students *to want* to know more and more about Pittsburgh, and I want them to be excited about writing and telling a good tale.

To prepare for the writing of these stories, students will complete research activities and read models of historical fiction about Pittsburgh. I would like students to discover details about the early days of Pittsburgh, during the late 1700s, 1800s and early 1900s, things that even their parents probably do not know. I hope that finding these little-known facts will spark the excitement that encourages students to want to know more. This excitement will in turn help them to create characters and settings that come to life and plots that are full of suspense and intrigue. The process of creating characters that come to life should improve their insight into human nature, Developing plots that are based on real events should increase their research and analytical skills as well as their powers of observation. Utilizing their creative writing skills should expand their repertoire of communications techniques. Students will learn to give effective constructive criticism by evaluating each other's work. Group discussions will improve the students' ability to express themselves well and create a process that will help them to clarify areas of confusion and to solve problems. I want the students to be anxious to share their information and to tell their exciting stories. Students will give oral presentations of their stories in a reading circle. This experience will help them to hone their dramatic and public speaking skills. The process of completing this unit will give students the opportunity to enhance their research skills, their creative and expository writing skills, their public speaking skills and their ability to integrate technology into the process of reading, writing and speaking.

Warm-up Activities

Students will begin this unit by finding out what they already know about early Pittsburgh history. To create an atmosphere of fun and anticipation, I will give the students a trivia quiz with a prize (probably a *bonus points* certificate for the person who gets the highest score. This trivia quiz will contain the original names of current Pittsburgh neighborhoods, "firsts" that occurred in Pittsburgh and famous Pittsburgh people and their claims to fame. Students will have ten minutes to complete this quiz. Next, I will give students a map of Pittsburgh that does not have the neighborhoods identified. I will also give the students a list of Pittsburgh neighborhoods. Students will then have ten minutes to correctly label the map with the neighborhoods. The student with the most correct answers will receive a prize.

I will not give the answers to the trivia and map questions that none of the students know. Instead, students must find out those answers for homework. They may ask other teachers or students or their parents or try to find the information in the library. They must bring in the completed sheets the next day to receive their bonus points. I hope that this will increase their interest in this unit. I have been successful in the past with the use of bonus points at the beginning of a unit to get students to pay attention to the topic and at least give the assignment a chance. This usually works because I offer very few opportunities for extra-credit since the assigned work often does not allow time for "extras." Once students buy into the topic, they are eager to learn more about it and to share what they have learned. That is one of my main objectives, to have students develop a sense of excitement about learning.

Background Information and Activities

After completing these warm-up activities, students will receive an overview of the assignment so that they can develop a focus for the background information and activities they will complete. Students will begin collecting background information by completing a short research activity. They will use *Encarta* and the internet to find facts about two historical fiction pieces that we will read. The stories include "The Old Man's Presence" by Marcia Davenport. The setting of this story is Pittsburgh's North Side in 1901, and the plot revolves around a son's struggle to retain control of a family steel mill. The other story is "Another Flood" by Mary Roberts Rhinehart. This story is also set in Pittsburgh's North Side. The year is 1904 and the plot builds around Mrs. Pitman's suspicion that a murder has been committed. These stories are models for the stories the students will write. I will give students a list of people, places and events that appear in these stories. Students will then choose one item to research and give a report to the class before we read the story to which the historical information applies. Students will use *Encarta Research Organizer* to create note cards that contain pertinent information and citations. Students will have one class period to find their information and one period to create a *Power Point* presentation to share their information with the class. Each presentation should have no more than four slides. During their presentations students will identify Pittsburgh people, places and events that are factual and then discuss the parts of the stories that are fictional so that they can see how historical fiction blends fact and fiction. Four class periods should be enough time for students to complete this activity since I will provide students with the topics and research sites. They will have the opportunity to do more independent research when they begin to write their own stories.

Students will then view several video excerpts that capture Pittsburgh in a variety of times and situations. These video excerpts will be taken from *North Side Story*, *Wylie Avenue Days*, *The Spirit of Pittsburgh*, *Heinz: The Story of an American Family*, *Things That Aren't There Anymore* and *The River Ran Red*. While these videos do not concentrate on the earliest eras of Pittsburgh, they do give students a sense of Pittsburgh past.

Next, we will look at a list of settings, people and events that are a part of Pittsburgh's history. I will give students some background information about these items. They may add their own ideas to the list. Students must take notes and then brainstorm ideas for short stories. This brainstorming session will take place after students have completed the background activities. Students will work in groups of four, with one student recording ideas. The recorder will share their group's ideas and then students should begin to make a detailed plan for their story.

Background Information on Pittsburgh History

In addition to the activities students have already completed to help them sketch out a plan for their stories, I will point out some people, places and events from Pittsburgh history that can be springboards for ideas. Many ethnic groups have left their mark here. Students will have an opportunity to survey a variety of material about the history of these ethnic groups in Pittsburgh. They will also look at the development of the land and of labor groups so that they have a rich foundation on which to build their stories.

Pittsburgh's historical significance is rooted in its geography. Henry Steele Commager said that, "Whoever commanded the Forks of the Ohio commanded the interior of the continent... (Pittsburgh) was at once the bridge from the east and the gateway to the west." (Lorant 9). Therefore, the battles waged over land provide ingredients for a good story. . In 1749 French soldiers claimed possession of the Ohio Valley for King Louis XV of France England and France battled for control of this area so that they could gain control of the continent. The French completed the building of Fort Duquesne in 1755. There were also vicious battles between Indians and whites. Washington's fight at Fort Necessity and the burning of Fort Duquesne also offer intriguing details.

Pittsburgh was not only endowed with strategic geographic qualities, but it was also blessed with many natural resources. "There was wood in the forests, coal in the hills, limestone, sandstone, clay in the soil, flax and cotton in the fields." (Lorant 47). There was also iron ore and fertile farmland. Many stories can have their roots in these riches that launched the rapid growth of Pittsburgh.

Perhaps a story could be woven around the dangerous journey of an escaped slave along Pittsburgh's underground railroad. These stops include sites in the downtown and Mt. Washington area. Students could create a character that meets the Dobrejacks, a 1920s immigrant Slovak family whose lives are controlled by the steel mills as described in *Out of This Furnace* by Thomas Bell. An adventure along one of the Indian trails that is currently a major Pittsburgh area highway could keep a reader on the edge of his seat. The setting could be U.S. Route 40, which was a famous east-west Indian trail called Nemacolin's Path.

Perhaps a story could grow out of the peace treaty between Colonel Stanwix and the Indians in 1758. Student will recognize the name as a prominent street (Stanwix Street) in downtown Pittsburgh. In 1755 French and Indian warriors defeated General Braddock in a battle for Fort Duquesne. Certainly, the nearby city of Braddock as well as a Pittsburgh street named Braddock Avenue will be familiar to students. There are many other events that contain names that students might recognize. For instance, in 1814 Allegheny Arsenal, designed by R.H. Latrobe, was established. It was built in the Lawrenceville district under the direction of Abraham Butler. All these names currently exist in the Lawrenceville area of Pittsburgh as names of streets or buildings. In 1862 seventy-eight people, mostly children who were employees at the arsenal, were killed in an explosion.

A number of story lines can be written about the adventures of George Washington's passage through the Pittsburgh area. In 1753 he said that the site that is now Pittsburgh would be a great place for a fort. He was also stranded on Garrison Island in the Allegheny River after his raft was crushed by floating ice. Another tale could be written about the experiences of Robert Sobo a Scotsman who in 1754 was one of two hostages taken to Fort Duquesne after the battle at Fort Necessity. Sobo made a drawing of the Fort and sent it to England. Reference to the Swiss can be made by creating a story about a conference in 1758 at Fort Duquesne between Indian Chiefs and Swiss soldier Colonel Henry Bouquet who accompanied General Forbes in the defeat of Fort

Duquesne. Forbes renamed the camp at Fort Duquesne after English Prime Minister William Pitt. He named it Pittsburgh. There is a story in the details of the life of Irishman George Croghan who was the most prominent Pennsylvania Trader in the mid 1700s. He noted that the Indians returned 338 white captives to Fort Pitt from 1759 through 1761.

Many other events can trigger ideas for stories. As long ago as 1804 there was concern for air pollution as General Presley Neville asked council to study the possibility of installing higher chimneys as a smoke control measure. Most of us do not think of Pittsburgh as the site for duels. Yet, in 1806 Tarleton Bates, Esq., the prothonotary of Allegheny County was killed in a duel against a storekeeper named Stewart. In 1810 the city was flooded. This event offers a backdrop for a good story as does the other floods that plagued the Pittsburgh area over time. Other catastrophic events such as the fire of 1845 can spark ideas. This fire started in the back of an icehouse on Second Avenue and destroyed 987 buildings and left over 12,000 people homeless. Interesting people such as women's rights activist, Jane Grey Swisshelm, provide story ideas. Swisshelm ran for mayor of Pittsburgh in 1851 and received only three votes. In 1857 Charlotte Jones was the first woman to be hanged in Allegheny County. She was convicted of killing her aunt and uncle for their money. George Westinghouse was only nineteen when he received a patent in 1865 for his invention of a rotary steam engine.

Labor issues also offer the basis of a good story. In 1841 there was a strike of six cotton factories in Allegheny (currently the North Side) followed by riots. In 1865 Pittsburgh was the site of the first trade union agreement in America. The agreement was between Sons of Vulcan and the iron industry. Pittsburgh railroad workers conducted a strike in 1877 for better wages and conditions. The strike became violent with many deaths, injuries and damaged buildings. Damages went beyond \$5,000,000. The Homestead Mill was also involved in a violent strike in 1882 when union members refused to sign the contract.

"Firsts" in the city of Pittsburgh also offer material for a story. The first water system in Pittsburgh began in 1802 with the installation of three wells on Market Street. In 1804 the first recorded strike in Pittsburgh occurred. Traveling journeymen shoemakers demanded higher wages. The first shoe-fitting factory in the United States was established here in 1817 by H. Childs and company. In 1824 Western University of Pennsylvania granted its first bachelor's degrees. There were six graduates. These are interesting pieces of trivia that can give students ideas for stories. In 1827 the first black church west of the Allegheny Mountains was established at Water and Smithfield Streets. It was the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. Pittsburgh's first public school opened in 1835 with only five students. The school was located in one room in a building on Seventh Street. And in 1837 the first public school for "Negroes" was opened. Yes, schools here were legally segregated at one time. Mary E. Schenley donated 300 acres of land in 1889 to be used for Pittsburgh's first park. A good story could take place atop a Pittsburgh Ferris wheel. It was invented by Pittsburgh's George Washington Ferris in 1893. Some funny happenings can be told about antics on Pittsburgh's first six-hole golf course, created in 1899. It was called Belmar and was located in Homewood. Suspense can surround details of Pittsburgh's first reported automobile accident in 1901. Students could indeed have fun digging into the past to find the roots of a good mystery, romance or adventure.

Getting a Better Idea – Story Ingredients

A class review of the elements of characterization, setting and plot will provide opportunities for further brainstorming of ideas for a story line.

Characterization

Students should get to know their characters in the same way that they get to know people in real life. For instance, consider this scenario.

Sixteen year old Jane goes to a community picnic with her girlfriends and hopes to meet an interesting, attractive young man that she may eventually date. Yes, she is looking for a new boyfriend. Sure enough, Jane spots a drop-dead handsome young man laughing and talking with a group of athletic looking guys. He is tall and muscular with a charming smile that flashes exquisite pearly white teeth. Jane excitedly whispers to her girlfriends, “Who’s that handsome piece of work? I’ve never seen him before.”

One of her friends answers, “I don’t know. Why don’t you go over and introduce yourself.” And that’s just what Jane decides to do. She walks over to the group and asks Billy who the new guy is.

Billy rolls his eyes and looks at the new guy and says, “Hey Vince, I’d like you to meet my neighbor, Jane. She cannot stand to have a UHM in town. That’s Unidentified Handsome Man. Jane, this is Vince.”

“Hello,” Vince said as he walks toward her. “Billy already told me who you were earlier. I couldn’t resist asking why such a knock-out came to the picnic unattached. I’m only in town for two weeks to help my uncle set up his new store, and then I head back to Virginia.”

Jane’s heart pounded as she listened to his deep resonant voice. “Happy to meet you, and thanks for the compliment,” Jane said with a flirty grin. “Don’t pay any attention to what Billy said. He’s just jealous.”

“I can see why.” Vince said smoothly. An apologetic look appeared on his face. “I hate to cut this conversation short, but I have to get over to the store to help with a delivery we’re getting. Can I come over and see you later? I know you live next door to Billy.”

“Sure.” Jane tried to sound nonchalant. “I’m only staying here for a couple of hours.” Vince said good-bye and walked over the broad expanse of thick green grass toward the road. Jane giggled as she ran back to her friends who were eagerly awaiting her report.

“Oh my gosh!” Jane gasped. “He’s just too good to be true! And he’s coming to visit me later this evening.” Sally, Marsha and Edith all wanted to hear a verbatim report of the conversation, but Liz had a decidedly grim look on her face. “What’s the matter, Liz?” Jane asked guardedly.

“Well, I wouldn’t get too cozy with Vincent Hale if I were you. My dad knows his uncle, Ray Hale. Mr. Hale told my dad that Vince attracts trouble like a magnet. That’s why he’s here for awhile, because he was accused of stealing equipment from a storage shed. He also has a real bad temper. Mr. Hale said he beat up five guys because they made fun of his poor reading skills. And my dad says that Vince has some big ugly secret, but Mr. Hale won’t give an inch on letting him know what it is.”

“I don’t believe that,” Jane said with a ring of uncertainty. Jane thought to herself, “He did seem too good to be true. Maybe Liz is right.”

Vince had already decided that he was not going to visit Jane that evening. He knew that Liz Conner’s dad was good friends with his Uncle Ray and that Uncle Ray had told all his business to Mr. Conner. Liz in turn would certainly tell all to her girlfriends, including Jane. Yes, he had been in some trouble, but he was trying to make a change. That’s why he had come here, to straighten himself out. He hoped his past would not ruin his chances of doing that. It all depended on whether or not he could get out of his present predicament.

This scene illustrates the elements of characterization: appearance, speech, actions, others’ attitudes towards the character, and the character’s inner thoughts and feelings. A dominant impression of Vince as a handsome, athletic, nice guy with a hint of mystery is created. This impression is supported by the details of his appearance, the things he says to Jane and his friendly, not-too-pushy behavior. The hint of mystery is introduced when Jane seeks others’ attitudes toward Vince. We learn a little about his intentions and begin to try to figure out what makes him tick and what the big secret is.

This is what the students must do as they create their characters. They must choose details that are consistent with the dominant impression they are developing. Their background reading can give them material from which to draw details.

Setting

The characters students create can only come to life in an appropriate setting. Setting refers to both time and place. Therefore, students must focus on descriptive details that bring a place and an era to life. For instance, perhaps the meeting between Jane and Vince could be at a picnic at The Point in 1903. This could be established at the beginning of the story where the narrator refers to the three rivers and the wilderness beyond The Point, perhaps a reference to the limited

number of buildings in the area. Perhaps Vince's uncle could own a steel mill instead of a store. Students will have to engage in research to find descriptions of sites in the Pittsburgh vicinity during the late 1800s-early 1900s.

Plot

While the storyline will be fictional, it should include some factual details. For instance, as the story of Jane and Vince develops, perhaps incidents of the Steel Strike of 1919 affect them, or events of the underground railroad as one of their friends' homes is revealed as a stop along the way. Students should craft their stories in such a way that a clear conflict is evident, one that begs a solution, thus building to a climax. They will follow the traditional pyramid short story structure of: exposition rising action or complication, climax, falling action or dénouement, and conclusion.

The traditional conflicts in literature include: person versus person, usually a physical struggle between two or more people; person versus self, a struggle with one's conscience; person versus nature, a struggle with the elements of nature such as storms or a rough ocean; person versus society, a struggle with the laws and rules. Students may choose to focus primarily on one of these or on several.

Ask Questions

Another way to build the plot is for students to make a list of questions that they should answer in order to include the factual aspect of the story. Students will then research their topics in the school library. For instance, if a student chooses a place as a starting point such as Fort Pitt during the mid 1700s, the student will find sources that describe this area. The list of questions would include: Where is Fort Pitt? Who was involved with Fort Pitt? What is Fort Pitt famous for? If the student wishes to set the story within a particular event such as the Steel Strike of 1919, he/she should list questions such as: What were the main causes of the strike? Where did it take place? How many people were involved? Who were the key players? What were the effects? What did Pittsburgh look like at that time?

Evolving Skills

As students build their story, they will develop skills in creating effective characters, setting and plot. Now the setting for the story of Jane and Vince may read more like this:

The afternoon was sunny and pleasant . For once the air did not seem so heavy with smoke from the nearby steel mill, and the barge traffic on the Ohio, Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers

that forged at The Point provided soothing background music. It was April 1, 1910 the tenth anniversary of the Carnegie-Frick merger.

Perhaps Vince's uncle is a relative of Henry Clay Frick, and Liz's father is a relative of Andrew Carnegie. The storyline could then be about the growing turmoil in the steel industry and how this budding love affair thrives in spite of the danger. As the students learn more, they should refine both the content and their techniques

Use Graphic Organizers

Using diagrams and other graphic organizers can help students remain focused and encourage them to both add and subtract details to produce a coherent, interesting story. One type of graphic organizer is a cluster diagrams. This works well for developing characters. For instance, Vince's name and dominant impression would be placed in a center circle with his character traits appearing in separate circles around his name. These subtopics would include: appearance, actions, his thoughts about people and things around him, strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, students can start with a plot based on a particular conflict or problem. The conflict or problem can be one that really existed in history. To build a story around that conflict or problem, students should ask, "What if" questions. What if Jane and Vince were runaway slaves? What if Vince's uncle was an organizer of the 1919 strike? What if they were long lost relatives of Andrew Carnegie? Students can then use a pyramid plot diagram to decide where details will fit.

This diagram begins with the exposition. This part of the story reveals the underlying problem or conflict. Definitive elements of characterization and setting may belong in this part of the plot. The climax is at the point of the pyramid. This occurs as soon as a solution to the problem is evident. Therefore, the student should create events as part of the rising action section of the diagram that move the plot toward this climax. Unnecessary details should be eliminated. Beginning with the setting can also help students to narrow their focus. They could think of a time and place first and then put characters into it and think of events that might happen there. Here again, students could use cluster diagrams to show what feeling they want the reader to evoke from the setting and then list the details that will help create that feeling. For instance, if the setting should give the reader an ominous feeling, the writer should put the word "ominous" in the center circle and then fill the surrounding circles or clusters with descriptive details that might emit such a feeling. Perhaps the characters are in a dark, damp, empty building. Maybe there is a menacing electrical storm in progress..

Other Things to Consider

Students should now be ready to put all these preliminary tasks together to create the skeleton, the bones of the story as my colleague, Diane Hughes, refers to this first draft. Then

they should “flesh” it out with details that make the story come to life with the intended effect. The stories must have a beginning, a middle and an end. The middle and end will be determined by the solution to the problem or conflict. Students do not have to have the entire plot planned out before they begin drafting. As they write, ideas will come.

Students must consider their purpose and audience in order to create the appropriate tone. Do they want the story to be romantic, humorous, or mysterious? The answer to that question depends on the purpose of the story. If the purpose is recreate a tragic event, then the writer may want to keep the tone serious. If the purpose is to poke fun at a serious situation, then the writer may want to include funny or exaggerated details to create a humorous or comic tone. The audience will be their classmates. They should consider what tone would be most interesting to their classmates.

Next students must plan the point of view – who is telling the story. First person creates a more personal effect than third person. For instance, if the Jane and Vince story were told from Jane’s point of view using first person, the reader would feel as if she/he were in Jane’s shoes. Jane would say, “I immediately spotted the most handsome man I had ever laid eyes on. My heart began to race and my breathing became heavy.” Third person from Jane’s point of view would make the events more objective. This same scene would read, “Jane spotted the most handsome man she had ever laid eyes on. Her heart began to race and her breathing became heavy.” The reader still sees events from Jane’s point of view, but the experience is more distant. Third person omniscient point of view allows the reader to view events from all characters’ points of view. Here the narrator is an outside observer who reports the thoughts and activities of all the characters but does not participate in them.

As students write, they should pay attention to their plan which includes the order of events. Chronological order will help students keep the order of events clear. However the use of *in medias rex* (in the middle of things) and flashbacks can help create suspense. However, students must be careful not to confuse the reader.

As students build characters, they should remember to show rather than tell. For instance, the reader infers that Vince is courageous because he risks his life to help an escaped slave. The writer does not simply say, “Vince is courageous.” This does not mean that the writer should never “tell.” It is important to have the right mix of direct and indirect description so that the reader understands the story.

Revising

After completing their draft, students should evaluate and then revise it. They should make sure that there is a beginning, middle and an end. The events should appear in chronological order. If the action starts in the middle of things or flashbacks are used, the writer must make sure the reader can clearly follow the events. Students must check to see that the point of view is consistent. Also, the story should be told primarily through the actions and dialogue of the characters. The main conflict or problem should be solved in an interesting and believable way.

Other Activities

Students will participate in warm-up activities each day (except library research days) to brush up on creative writing techniques. For instance, we will look at several ways of beginning a story: describing the setting, beginning in the middle of the action, starting with dialogue and describing a character. We will review correct punctuation for dialogue and strategies for appealing to the senses. Several class periods will be designated as “reading circle” days where students must read what they have composed so far. The rest of the class must give feedback. During their research, students should find a picture that they can include on the cover of their project.

The Final Product

When students put the final pieces together, they may use any technology in addition to *Microsoft Word* that they are comfortable with including the scanner, *PageMaker* desktop publishing, *PowerPoint* or *PrintShop*. When the stories are finished, students will read them and receive feedback in the story circle. All completed projects will be displayed. We may also bind all the stories in a single volume.

Order

The final project must have a cover with a title, an illustration and the author’s name on the front. The back cover must have a blurb about the plot of the story. The title page should have the title, author, class, teacher and date. Next, students should include a preface that explains why they chose to write that particular story.

Next is the story itself. Each page should be numbered at the bottom. Finally, students should include an appendix that lists and identifies historical people, places and events that appear in the story. There should also be an analysis of the main character. Students must include a bibliography in this section.

Resources

Students will make use of many research and technology resources during this unit. I will work with the librarian to find books, internet sources and database sources about Pittsburgh. We can order books from many other libraries if our school library does not have the titles students need. Students may use the *Discovering Authors* database to find works about Pittsburgh. The *Electric Library* has a database called “Stack of Decades” that students can use

to find information about events during particular decades. Students may also access the “Associated Press Photo Archives” to find photographs that may be useful. In addition, we will take a field trip to the main Carnegie Library in Oakland which has an extensive section on Pittsburgh. I will reserve computer lab time well in advance so that students may have a solid block of time to work on their Power Point presentations and on their final projects. The computer labs give students access to *Microsoft Word*, *Publisher Encarta*, *Encarta Organizer*, *Power Point* and the databases. My classroom computers also have *PageMaker* and *PrintShop*. Students will also be able to use the many books and handouts that I received during the *Interdisciplinary Views of Pittsburgh* seminar. Students may also use any of the videos about Pittsburgh that I have. If they want to use them during times other than the class time when they were shown, they must do so in school only, either before school, after school, or during their lunch period.

Lesson Plans – Before the first draft

The sample lessons below contain activities that would be helpful in preparing students to begin the actual drafts of their stories. They should have as much background as possible before they undertake the culminating task of writing an historical fiction piece.

Lesson 1

- A. Topic - Background activities; How much do you know?
- B. Time – 2 class periods
- C. Objective – Students will make a judgement about how well they know Pittsburgh’s history by completing a trivia quiz
- D. Rationale – The purpose of this lesson is to motivate students to want to know more about Pittsburgh’s history so that they take ownership of this project.
- E. Material – quizzes; bonus points certificates
- F. Procedure
 1. Ask students to raise their hand if they think they know a lot about the history of Pittsburgh. Ask students to share some of the things they know.
 2. Next, tell students that they will have ten minutes to complete a quiz that asks questions about Pittsburgh. Tell students that the one with the most correct answers will receive a 5 point extra-credit certificate.
 3. Distribute the quizzes and collect them after 10 minutes. The quiz contains trivia questions as well as a map of Pittsburgh that students must label with the names of the neighborhoods.

4. Go over the answers, asking the students to give the correct answers. Discuss the items as the class proceeds. Do not give the correct answer to a question if no one knows it. Students must find those answers for homework.
 5. See who has the most correct answers and present him/her with a bonus certificate.
 6. Tell the rest of the class that they too can earn bonus points by finding the rest of the answers on the quiz and returning it the next day. Students may use any source to find answers.
 7. During the next class go over the rest of the answers. Present bonus points certificates to all students who have correctly answered all questions.
- G. Standards - Students should complete at least 80% of the quiz correctly on their own. They should have 100% of the correct answers written on their quizzes after we go over all answers.

District Standards – CO 5,6,7

New Standards – Writing #9

Lesson 2

- A. Topic – Historical fiction models
- B. Time – 1 class periods
- C. Objective – Students will identify characteristics of historical fiction. They will demonstrate understanding of the brief research activity by writing appropriate questions about their topic and by reviewing the assignment.
- D. Rationale – This lesson encourages students to consider in-depth research as an essential component of historical fiction. They will look at two examples of historical fiction and discover that many of the people, places or events actually existed. They will examine how the authors combine fact and fiction in this genre. To expedite this part of the unit, I will assign the research topic rather than allowing students to choose from the list. I will also indicate exactly where they should find their information in the library.
- E. Material – assignment sheet; copies of two historical fiction stories; a list of people, places and events that are referenced in the stories; note cards that have the items on the list, as well as the library sources.
- F. Procedure

1. Pass out the project assignment sheet and time-line. Go over it with the students and answer any questions.
 2. Tell the class that they will read two stories that are set in the early days of Pittsburgh. Before reading the stories, students will research one historical detail that appears in the stories. Pass out the list of historical people, places and events so that students can see if they already know anything about these details. Discuss what students already know.
 3. Next, ask each student to pick a research card from the stack of note cards that are face down. The item on the card is the one he/she will research. The source of the information is also on the card since students will have only one class period to complete this activity.
 4. Review how to access the resource that each student will use.
 5. Students must now write a list of questions that they would like to answer about their topic.
- G. Standards – Students will complete the list of research questions.
- District Standards – CO 1,5,6,7 New Standards – Writing #9

Lesson 3

- A. Topic – Research
- B. Time – 1 class period
- C. Objective – Students will use one or two library resources to find information on their research topic. They will record their information on note cards using *Encarta Research Organizer*.
- D. Rational – Students will have only one class period to complete this activity. Therefore, I will provide them with the topics and sources they will use. Students will have many opportunities for independent research when they begin to work on their own stories.
- E. Material – list of topics’ duplicate set of research topic cards; student disks
- F. Procedure
 1. Students will report directly to the computer lab with their questions and research topic and source.

2. Students should work independently to take notes using *Encarta* note cards. They must put information in their own words rather than cutting and pasting from the source.

3. Students should turn in all material at the end of class.

G. Standards - Students will complete this activity during the time allotted.

District Standards – CO 1,2,4,5,7

New Standards – Writing #4, 9

Lesson 4

A. Topic – PowerPoint presentation

B. Time – 2 class periods

C. Objective – Students will prepare a PowerPoint presentation of the material they researched the day before and present it to the class.

D. Rationale – The use of PowerPoint to present this information helps students become more proficient in the use of technology and the presentation appeals to all three learning styles- auditory, visual and kinesthetic.

E. Material – student notes and disks

F. Procedure

1. Students should report directly to the computer lab and pick up their assignment sheets, disks and notes and begin to create their presentations.

2. Students should work independently, using the notes they took. This presentation should have no more than 4 slides. Students should make sure that the special effects they choose do not detract from the conveying of information that must take place.

3. When all presentations are prepared, students will use the projector in the lab to give their presentations. Students must take notes.

G. Standards – Students should complete this activity in the allotted time. The presentations must meet all specifications on the assignment sheet.

District Standards CO 1,2,4,5,7

New Standards – Writing #4, 9

Lesson 5

- A. Topic – Model Stories
- B. Time – 1 class period
- C. Objective – Students will demonstrate effective reading strategies. They will identify characteristics of historical fiction and effective creative writing techniques.
- D. Rationale – For this project, students should have as much background information and samples as possible. This will help them to produce a more effective piece of writing. By examining models of Pittsburgh historical fiction, students will have a clear idea of what is expected.
- E. Material – copies of the 2 stories: “the Old Man’s Presence” by Marcia Davenport and “Another Flood” by Mary Roberts Rhinehart.
- F. Procedure
 - 1. Review the factual details that will appear in this story.
 - 2. Volunteers will read the story aloud. The reading should be expressive and dramatic.
 - 3. During the reading students should make note of strategies and elements of style that impress them.
 - 4. After reading the stories, students will discuss setting, characterization, plot and style.
 - 5. In their journals, students will summarize what they learned about writing historical fiction. Each student will then share one thing they learned.
- G. Standards – All students will complete the reading and journal writing activities.

District Standards - CO 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 New Standards – Writing #1, 9; Reading #1,5

Lesson 6

- A. Topic – Historical background information about Pittsburgh
- B. Time – 1 class period
- C. Objective – Students will listen to information about Pittsburgh’s past and then look through some books about Pittsburgh. They will demonstrate their understanding of the material by taking notes and asking questions.

- D. Rationale – If I tell several good stories about Pittsburgh and narrate some of the important events, students will be more willing to listen than if I gave a boring lecture. So I will present students with a list of people, places and events, but I will tell them stories about many of those items. I will also let them know that these details are good ideas for their own stories. Students must take notes to use as they work on their project. Asking students to write a trivia question at the end of class will encourage them to pay attention and to review their notes.
- E. Material – list of Pittsburgh people, places and events
- F. Procedure
1. Students must take out their notebooks to take notes during this session. Each student will use their notes to come up with one trivia question at the end of class.
 2. I will start this “lecture” with “Did you know…” and then proceed to share information with the students about many interesting people and events. I will particularly refer to the neighborhoods that they are familiar with.
 3. Near the end of class students will compose their trivia questions and see who can answer them.
 4. Students should begin discussing possible topics for their stories.
- G. Standards – All students will listen attentively, take notes and write the trivia question.

District Standards - CO 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

New Standards – Writing #1, 9; Listening #2

Lesson 7

- A. Topic – Viewing video clips
- B. Time – 2 class periods
- C. Objective – Students will view several video segments that capture Pittsburgh during different eras. They will write details in their journals about settings, characters and events.
- D. Rationale – As students begin to plan their stories they need many examples to help them with the details. These video segments will help them to visualize details of Pittsburgh’s history so that they can incorporate them into their stories.
- E. Material – Movies: *North Side Story*, *Wylie Avenue Days*, *The Spirit of Pittsburgh*, *Heinz: the story of an American Family*, *Things That Aren’t There Anymore*, *The River Ran Red*, and *The Richest Man in the World*.

F. Procedure

1. I will show segments of the films listed above and ask students to look for details they can use in their own stories. They should note the settings, examine some of the people as prototypes for their characters and jot down some of the events that could be the basis of the plot of their story.
2. After viewing the video segments, students will each share one item from their notes such as a setting description or a brief character sketch.

G. Standards – All students will complete the note-taking and sharing of a writing technique garnished from the videos.

District Standards - CO 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 New Standards – Writing #1, 9; Listening #2; Viewing #4

Lesson 8

A. Topic – Brainstorming

B. Time – 1 class period

C. Objective – Students will work in small groups to come up with ideas for a story line. They will share information and suggestions for getting started. Near the end of class each group will present their ideas to the class.

D. Rationale – Getting started is often the hardest part of writing. By working together, students can help each other over this part of the process.

E. Material – worksheet

F. Procedure

1. Students will be assigned to groups of three or four. One student will be the task master and one will be the recorder. The task is for each student to come up with at least a sketchy idea of a story line. Group members should share information gleaned from all the preliminary activities to come up with ideas.
2. Each student will fill in a worksheet that asks for the main idea of the story, the setting and a brief description of the main characters. Students will have 20 minutes to do this.
3. During the last ten minutes of class, each student will share his/her story idea with the class.

G. Standards – All students should have articulated a story idea.

Additional Activities

- Write a list of questions to answer during research. These answers will help to develop story lines.
- Complete practice sheets on how the story should begin. These work sheets will ask students to start with a description of the setting. Start with a description of the main character. Start in the middle of the action. Examples of each of these story starters will appear on the work sheets.
- Students will participate in the reading circle to share the beginning of the story, the first draft and the final draft.
- Students will write a character analysis of the main character to show how he/she represents values of the times.
- Daily review activities will include grammar, style and usage work sheets. Students will pick these up at the beginning of class and turn them in at the end.
- Students must word process their final copies. They must create a cover, title page and appendix in addition to the story.

Appendix

District Standards

It is easy to see that this unit addresses most of the District's communications standards.

CO 1 (Communications Standard One) states that *All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.* Students will use our library's data bases such as *Encarta, Access PA and Electric Library*, the internet and books of fiction and historical information.

CO-2 states that *All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.* Students will gain understanding of the readings through question/answer sessions, class discussions and writing assignments .

CO-3 states that *All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make observations and solve problems.* Students will apply what they read to the construction of their short stories, thus demonstrating their ability to make observations and solve problems. Also, the plot of the story must encompass a conflict or problem that must be solved.

CO-4 states that *All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.* Students will write for all of these reasons throughout the course of this unit. The story will narrate events. The appendix will inform the reader and the solving of the story's conflict will persuade.

CO-5 states that *All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.* These areas will be addressed in class discussions about the story ideas and the factual information students will use.

CO-6 states that *All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.* Group discussions and oral presentations of the finished stories will address this standard.

CO-7 states that *All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purposes, structure and use.* During the course of this unit students will be required to listen to lectures and view video clips where they will have to demonstrate competency of this standard.

CO-8 states that *All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.* As part of their oral presentations, students will give background information about the historical facts on which the story is based.

New Standards Portfolio

The work addressed in this unit can also satisfy many of the requirements of the *New Standards Portfolio* that all students must assemble throughout the course of each school year. The portfolio contains three major exhibits: the *Reading Exhibit*, *Writing Exhibit* and *Speaking and Listening Exhibit*.

The *Reading Exhibit* requires evidence that students can effectively read informational texts, public documents and functional documents. Students will be exposed to these types of texts as they do their background research. Students may also include the reading they complete during this unit in their *25 Book Club* journal to satisfy the “Evidence of Quantity, Range and Depth” entry.

The *Writing Exhibit* requires a “Response to Literature” entry. Students will address this by reading several examples of historical fiction and then responding to prompts about the reading. Another entry is “Demonstration of Proficiency in a Literary Genre.” Since students will specifically work on producing a short story, they will clearly address this entry. This exhibit also requires a “Report.” Students may choose the research information on which they base their stories to fulfill the “Report” entry. If students have chosen other assignments to fulfill the *Writing Exhibit* entries, they may select their story as a “Free Pick,” which is another requirement for this exhibit.

The activities in this unit easily lend themselves to the *Speaking and Listening Exhibit*. Students will present their research findings and their stories orally to the class. Students will complete evaluation or response sheets for the speakers. These can be used as evidence for the “Gathering and Reporting” entry. Students may also select written responses to video clips and movies in this unit as evidence of the “Viewing Option.”

Technology

This unit addresses the District’s technology standards which require teachers to incorporate technology into the curriculum on several different levels. There are five levels.

Level one – substitution- mimics basic classroom tasks on the computer. Level one activities during this unit include the use of word processing,

Level two – application- refers to the use of one application such as *Encarta*. Students will complete this level of activity when they use *Encarta Organizer* to write note cards.

Level three – integration- refers to learning a concept or completing a project using two or more applications. Students will use several applications during this project including *Microsoft Word*, *Publisher* and *PowerPoint*

Level four – research and production- involves the use of a variety of media to conduct and present research. Students will demonstrate proficiency at this level by using *Electric Library*, the internet, *Associated Press Photo Archives* and several databases. Students will also produce oral reports assisted by *PowerPoint* and will use *Publisher* or *PageMaker* to produce a booklet.

Some students may reach level five- development- if they choose to expand this project to use *Adobe Premiere* or to create a website for their stories.

Reading Lists

Student Annotated Reading List

African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition. Austin, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1992. This anthology is a collection of writings by African American authors.

Alter, Robert Edmond. *High Spy.* New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967. "Pennsylvania in 1793 is the setting for swift-paced adventure as Whit learns of Pontiac's planned rebellion, is captured, later adopted by Indians, escapes and survives many dangers to play a vital part in breaking the siege of Fort Pitt."

Beatty, Jane. *Literature and Language.* Boston, McDougal Littell, 1994. This is the ninth grade literature anthology.

Beatty, Patricia. *Eight Mules from Monterey.* New York, William Morrow and Co., 1982. This is an example of historical fiction. "The author draws on incidents and personalities from the Western past. The year is 1916 and the Monterey mountain country is still wild as the Ashmores discover once they set out."

Cassel, Virginia C. *Juniata Valley.* New York, Viking Press, 1981. "A vigorous, exciting and well-written account of the struggle between Whites and Indians in mid-18th century Pennsylvania."

Clarke, John. *Black Soldier.* New York, Doubleday, 1942. This is an example of historical fiction. "George Bunty wanted to do his part in World War II – but it seemed as if the U.S. Army, not the Germans, was his enemy."

Collier, James Lincoln, and Christopher Collier. *With Every Drop of Blood.* New York, Delacort Press, 1994. "After escaping from his master, fourteen year old Daniel Arabus travels to Philadelphia with a message for members of the Constitutional Convention. An exciting fast-paced historical adventure."

Eemarest, Jr., David P., ed. *From These Hills From These Valleys.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976. This is a collection of fiction about Western Pennsylvania.

Shank, William. *Indian Trails to Super Highways.* York, American Transportation Center, 1988. This booklet traces important events in Pennsylvania transportation history from the days of Indian trails to our super highways.

Underground Railroad. Washington, National Park Service, 1990. This book contains essays that tell the story of attempts to escape slavery in the south during the Civil War.

War for Empire in Western Pennsylvania. Fort Ligonier Association, 1993. This book contains stories of war in Pennsylvania. The adventures of Washington, Braddock, Forbes and others are included.

Witthoft, John. *The American Indian As Hunter.* Harrisburg, PHMC, 1999. This publication describes the American Indian's respect for the land and details their hunting traditions.

Teacher Reading List

Bell, Thomas. *Out of This Furnace.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press. 2976. This novel includes the story of immigrant labor in the Pittsburgh area.

Hays, Samuel P. *City at the Point.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989 This book examines the experiences of various ethnic and racial groups in Pittsburgh as well as the class structure.

Lorant, Stefan. *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City.* Pittsburgh, Esselmont Books, LLC, 1999. This fifth edition chronicles Pittsburgh's history from the beginning.

Lubove, Roy. *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press. 1969. Among other things, this book describes Pittsburgh's change from a smokey city to a renaissance city.

Warren, Kenneth. *The American Steel Industry 1850-1970.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973. This book includes details of the ups and downs of the steel industry here in Pittsburgh.

Stowell, David O. *Streets, Railroads and the Great Strike of 1877.* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999. This strike is described as one of the most bitter in American History.

Trotter, Jr., Joe William and Eric Ledell Smith, eds. *African Americans in Pennsylvania.* University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. This book gives the history of blacks in Pennsylvania And describes the African American experience from various perspectives.

Wright, J.E. and Doris s. Corbett. *Pioneer Life in Western Pennsylvania.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968. This book has interesting details of everyday life in the early days of Pennsylvania.