

“You’ve Got “Male”:

Finding Male Role Models in the African-American Community

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Overview

Rationale

Objectives

Strategies

Classroom Activities

Annotated Bibliography/Resources/Standards

Appendices

Overview

It is an alarming fact that there is an overwhelming quantity of African American males in the special education classrooms of the United States. Within the past three decades, studies continue to reveal a pattern of overrepresentation of African American students in special education classrooms for mental retardation, specific learning disabilities, behavior disorders, physical impairments, visual impairments, and speech impairments (Watkins 223). Current statistics show that African American males make up 9% of the total student enrollment in public

schools, yet in the category of mental retardation that number balloons to 20%. In other categories such as emotional disturbance and learning disability, African American males account for 21% and 12% correspondingly (US Department of Education NCES, 2000). These numbers continue to increase steadily each year.

As a learning support teacher in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, I am presented with a snap shot of these facts Monday through Friday. Of my fourteen students, ranging in grade levels from second to fifth grade, eleven are African American males. It leads to the question: Why are black males more commonly identified? What is the common thread? While there are many factors and conditions that qualify students as needing special education services (discrepancies between ability and achievement, attention deficits, emotional disturbances, mental retardation, etc), the population also has common traits within the family structure. By doing an informal survey of my students (male and female), I have found a distressing, but sadly not surprising, collective thread. The majority of my students (10 of 14) have no daily contact with their fathers. The presence of fatherly figures ranges from monthly encounters, to long absences due to incarcerations, to complete absence in their lives.

This unit revolves around having students find positive male role models in their families and the community. The unit can be integrated into any Communications and/or Social Studies curriculum. The unit was designed to be used with fourth and fifth grade students with learning disabilities. However, since the unit *is* designed for students with special needs, the unit itself is extremely flexible. The unit can be modified and adapted to be used for higher or lower level students. In view of the fact that the unit was designed with learning support students in mind, the students will determine the length/time of the unit. I have long learned that time is a commodity with students with disabilities. My time and *their time* are two different animals. It is best to make a professional judgment as to how long each “phase” of the project should go. I would recommend at minimum devoting a month to the unit. We want the students to have a significant experience, but at the same time, we do not want them to get bored or overwhelmed. You be the judge.

The unit would begin by posing the question, “What is a role model?” Students would be involved with defining a solid definition. To get to this definition, literary sources pulled from the curriculum and outside sources will help the students define what they deem a role model should be. The students will read several pieces of literature (age appropriateness and instructional reading levels considered) that will help guide them in defining a consensus definition. The definition would then be turned into a checklist/rubric to be used later on within the unit. The main objective of this phase to allow the students to get a general picture of what a role model is and what *they* would look for in their own personal role models. We want to get the students involved in a healthy dialogue that examines the male figure in their own lives, in their community, in society. Here is where we begin the foundation of the unit.

The students will then progress towards the oral history portion of the unit. This portion of the unit will begin by explaining to the students what oral history is and how it is/can, be utilized. Oral history can allow students with less well-developed reading and writing skills to learn a great deal about the past and produce successful, motivating projects (Walbert 149). I believe the best way of explaining oral history to my population of students is through *passive* oral history.

Passive oral history is the presentation of oral history sources from which students will learn. This is accomplished by integrating “ready-made” sources of oral history into existing curricula. The use of audio recordings, videotapes, books, television programs, websites, and other electronic media containing renditions of oral history are some of the resources that can expose the student to this methodology as well as provide content for the curricular area of study (1).

“Ready-made” sources of oral history will be presented to the students. It is my hope (fingers crossed) that through this presentation, the students will become inspired as to what they might be able to accomplish later on within the unit.

The next logical step in the unit is to teach the students how to conduct successful interviews. The first step is to help students get familiar with the three types of questions asked during an interview: *factual*, *descriptive*, and *evaluation*. Once the students are familiar with the different forms of questions, with their checklist in hand (created in the first phase) the students will be involved in several activities that will allow them to create a question outline and question that may or may not be used in the interviewing. The students will have an opportunity to practice interviewing their peers to work out the kinks. The mock interview will aid in helping the students become familiar with what interviewing is. It is important to allow the students to make mistakes. The mistakes will help them develop better questions and allow them to become more comfortable with the interviewing process. It will also help the student in creating more functional questioning for their interviews.

The next portion of the unit will involve *active* oral history.

Active oral history implies the role of student as “novice researchers” collecting their own oral histories. The student, accordingly, engages in researching a topic, interviewing respondents, comparing other historical documentations, analyzing and interpreting data, developing narratives, producing products, and presenting finished work. This interactive, student-centered style of investigation and education gives the learner an enhanced and empowered role in the acquisition of skills and

the factual elements of the instruction unit (1).

The students will become “role model researchers.” With checklist and interview questions in hand, our mini “role model researchers” will set off to find male figures that fit their criteria. These figures will range from people the students know to people supplied by the community (community centers, senior citizen homes, churches, etc) and/or me (so have some ready in case of emergency). The checklist will help the students in finding fitting role models to interview. The students will conduct “preliminary” interviews to see if the interviewees are fit for the project.

After students conduct their “preliminary” interviews, appointments will be set up by the teacher to have the interviewees to come to the school to be interviewed. Having the role models come to the school allows the teacher to evaluate the student doing the interview. This scenario also allows me to be able to control the equipment and try to get the best audio possible. It will also give the role models an opportunity to see the students in their “natural environment”. Since one of the goals is to create a mentorship through the school, having the role models at the school will be the first step in building this partnership.

The students will use the questions prepared. After the interviews take place, the students will come together and listen to the interviews that each of their peers conducted. The students will discuss the interviews and decide if each interviewee can be deemed as an appropriate role model. The students will then create writing pieces around the topic of their role model and why they can be considered role models. The writing pieces will be published and combined into a portfolio for each student.

The culminating event involves inviting the role models to the classroom for a luncheon (since these are men, I am thinking you are going to need more than finger sandwiches...) The students will read their essays to the men (I am sure I will cry...). The goal of this unit is to build mentoring relationships between these students and the men. I hope to be able to develop a mentoring program around the unit.

Rationale

After completing the informal survey of my students (as mentioned in the overview), I could not help but to contemplate the topic further. If these children lacked fathers in their daily lives, what *other* male figures are in these children’s lives? Where do these male figures come from? Are they suitable role models for

these children? Once again, I set off to do another informal survey. I asked my students, “Who are your role models?” I received answers from my mom, to notorious rappers, to famous athletes, to Barack Obama (gave a sigh of relief after that one. Not all is lost). Upon further probing, I asked the students, “Who are role models in your lives today? Male role models that you have actual *contact* with?” After several minutes, I received answers such as “my big brother”, “my dad”, “my uncle”, “my neighbor”. I asked the students what they *wanted* in a good role model. As they began rattling off their lists, I took notes: intelligent, nice, interesting, employed, educated, talented, patient, etc. My last question seemed to baffle my students completely; “Does your male role model possess these traits?” Dead silence. Awkward pause. Crickets. Not *one* of my students could vouch for their role models. Not *one* of my students could truthfully say that their role models held all, or some, of those traits.

In light of the above discovery, the rationale for creating this unit is because it was *needed*. Simple as that. I am working with a population of kids that are at a high risk of becoming a lost generation. In a recent case study performed by John Engberg and Brian Gill, it was estimated that approximately 45% of African American males in the Pittsburgh Public School system will graduate. The study considers many factors that play a role in the drop out rate of this population. However, the tragic fact still exists that less than half of black boys will ever gain a diploma. It is my goal and main objective to make sure that the ominous 45% includes every single African American boy that steps foot into my classroom.

The culminating goal of this unit is to create a relationship between the students in my classroom and positive male role models. Recent and past studies have shown that youth that are involved with school/site-based mentoring (SBM) programs showed improvements in: academic performance, positive attitude toward school, relationships with peers, grade promotion, and high school graduation. SBM programs also reported decreases in: bullying/fighting in school, unexcused absences, tardiness, and substance abuse.

This study was an evaluation of a SBM program serving youth at risk for not completing high school, as determined by the school district. The mentors were adults in the community and the youth were in grades 1st through 5th. The majority of teachers and parents reported the mentor was able to help the mentee in expressing themselves verbally and in writing, helping them to read, increasing their confidence, improving their ability to listen and sense of responsibility. In addition, over 70% of teachers and parents reported that in general the mentors were able to help a great deal. One teacher commented about a student that “Because of having a mentor, this was my most improved student.” (2)

Any teacher would *love* to have their students exhibit the above stated traits. Our biggest problem as teachers is figuring out how to instill these traits into our students within a school day. A teacher’s day is filled with instructing students, creating lesson plans, IEP writing and meetings, keeping up with grades, lunch duty, intervention periods, faculty meetings, creating bulletin boards, keeping up with new teaching methods and the ever changing teaching criteria. With all this to do, it would be a TREMENDOUS help knowing there was someone else willing to help our students develop into being a complete and active member of society. Therefore, I cannot say that my intentions are not selfish as well. I want to help my students blossom into being the best people they can be, but I cannot be with them all the time. I cannot extend my limbs to stretch around their entire world, to protect and guide them. That’s were this unit steps in and the mentors step in.

Objectives

The foremost goal of this unit is to introduce the students to male role models that can possibly serve as mentors throughout their developmental years. Through the unit, I hope to develop a mentoring program that extends beyond the academic requirements. Mentor prgrams are found to create closer relationships and/or stronger impacts when the following practices are followed:

- When the relationship between the mentor and mentee is marked by authenticity, empathy, collaboration, and companionship.
- When mentors and mentees discuss personal relationships and social issues.
- Securing school support
- Match activities that are socio-emotional or a mix of socio-emotional and academic
- Similarity between mentor-youth

These objectives are integrated into the development of the oral history portion of the unit. Student objectives are both academic and holistic. Holistic referring to development of strong character and self worth. At Pittsburgh Miller, the students are taught a value system called the Nguzo Saba, created by Dr. Maulana Karenga. This value system was created to introduce and reinforce principles of African culture. These ideals contribute to building and reinforcing family, community and culture among African American people. The Nguzo Saba is based on seven principles: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibilities), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). With this in mind, the student objectives include (but are not limited to):

- Learn related disciplines
- Learn research skills
- Develop basic writing skills
- Develop interpersonal skills
- Demonstrate appropriate speaking and listening skills
- Identify the purposes of communication
- Create a product based on their oral history investigation
- Be able to compare their primary source information with literature and additional research information
- Develop language abilities, critical thinking skills and comprehension, and the understanding of community and self
- Demonstrate the literacy skills required to identify and analyze visual, oral, and written primary sources
- Creates understanding that bridges generations
- Demonstrate the techniques of recording oral history

Strategies

This unit has been designed with 5th grade Learning Support students in mind. These are students that have been identified as having significant learning needs, which require specially designed instruction to enable them to achieve academic success. The students I work with have a wide range of learning discrepancies, but one of the most common traits among my population is a limited ability to read and comprehend printed material. Therefore, many of the strategies that will be used take on the form of a guided instruction and practice activity. The main text used has audio recording to accompany them, as well as graphic organizers to help the students comprehend and retain information. The individualized reading selections have been chosen to suit the reading level differences amongst my students.

Classroom Activities

Being a special education teacher, it is best to never put a static timeline on instructional time and planned activities. With my population of students, it is always best to make sure time lines are flexible and interactive. Therefore, when describing the time line of this unit, I will not be using common terms, such as lesson one or day one. Instead, I will describe the lessons as phases. This term is more appropriate for my students because I want them to be able to make deep connections with the material presented. If you are on a time crunch and absolutely *need* to make time requirements, please do so. This unit was created with 5th grade students with learning disabilities in mind, so the “phases” lend themselves to be flexible.

Phase 1

My students' day usually begins with a warm up in the morning. This is a perfect way to start the unit off because it is not too aggressive, but it is enough to pique the interest of the students. A prompt will be written on the board that asks the question, "What is a role model?" Have the students write a two to three sentence response to the prompt. To differentiate the response, those students who may not be able to write comprehensible complete sentences, can be asked to write a short list of adjectives that describes a role model. Sometimes as teachers, we differentiate based on interest, sometimes due to special needs that must be supported. What we *always* do as inclusive teachers is adjust instruction in a manner that challenges students, accommodated for learning needs, and is sensitive to the fact that all children want to participate and be successful (Chadwick 199).

After giving the students several minutes to come up with their responses, have them share their answers with the class. On a large piece of chart paper, paraphrase the responses of those students that wrote sentences. On the same chart paper, make a list of the adjectives that the other students made. Have the students discuss the similarities and differences between the responses. After a lengthy discussion, explain to the students that we will be reading selections of literature that have role models as main characters. Let them know that it will be their job to define what role models are through the characters actions. As we read these selections, the list that created during the warm up will grow with descriptions of role models and adjectives that describe role models. At the end of this phase, the list will be condensed and saved for further use later in the unit.

The next couple of lessons will involve the students reading selections of literature that exemplify role models. The child with special needs gains tremendously from examples given before the group work begins. Depending on your populace of students, this may take one to three days, a week, or even a month. It is best to make a professional judgment based on the needs of you students. For each selection, a worksheet naming the "role model" character from

each piece of reading will have a blank list, to be filled out by the students, naming the characteristics/traits the character held. Each student will have a working binder to keep track of their artifacts as they continue through the unit. After each selection, have the student place the worksheets in their binder.

For comparison purposes and to really "hammer in" the concept of a role model, I have selected four main selection readings for the students to partake in as a class. In addition, I will assign the students two individual reading assignments. The main selections will be taken from the Pittsburgh Public Schools reading curriculum assigned to 5th grade. Therefore, the audio cds that accompany the curriculum can be used for students that have a hard time decoding the text. These students can listen to the audio cd, while the other students read the story aloud. So that these students do not feel excluded, the first time we encounter the text, I will read. The second time, the students that have a higher oral reading fluency rate will read in pairs, while the others listen to story again through the cd listening station.

The school librarian and I have selected the individual reading assignments ahead of time. While the students will have several choices to choose from, the selections will all have a low readability/high interest rating. Therefore, the frustration levels will not defer them from taking part. Once again, make a professional judgment on how much you want the students to read. I have found that my students enjoy comparing and contrasting texts. The more they have to compare and contrast, the more their interests are engaged. For that reason, I have included a lot of reading for the students.

Main Selection 1:

When Esther Morris Headed West by Connie Nordhielm Wooldridge.

This inspiring tale of one woman's gumption and perseverance also recommends the forward-thinking men of Wyoming. Long before "feminist" became a household word, there was Esther Morris, a "large woman with wide-open ideas that needed more room than could be had in New York or Illinois, where she'd

come from." The feisty 55-year-old heads out for the more liberal-minded Wyoming territory in 1869, and the legislature votes in favor of women's suffrage soon thereafter. Having won the right to vote, Morris runs for justice of the peace, thus becoming the first woman in the United States to hold a public office. Spicing her prose with a down-home twang, Wooldridge (*Wicked Jack*) pulls a plum out of the pie of American history. Rogers's (*The Ghost of Sifty-Sifty Sam*) comic flair informs every inch of her expansive watercolors, especially the character sketches. She endows each with a distinct personality: the dumpling-cheeked Morris rolls her eyes while her doctor takes her pulse in order to show that "voting had no ill effects on a woman's health"; Col. William Bright, who championed women's right to vote, meets Esther while getting a shave at the barber shop; and Benjamin Sheeks, the biggest opponent to women's suffrage, makes a credible transition to supporter in Rogers's paintings.

Main Selection 2:

Goin' Someplace Special by Patricia C. McKissack.

Confronted with the indignities and humiliations of segregated Nashville in the 1950s, young "Tricia Ann holds her head high and remembers that she is "somebody, a human being--no better, no worse than anybody else in this world." For the first time, "Tricia Ann has been allowed to venture outside her community all by herself. Her grandmother has prepared her well, fortifying her "with enough love, respect, and pride to overcome any situation." "Tricia Ann, though frustrated by the Jim Crow laws that forbid her, as an African American, to enter certain restaurants and hotels, or even to sit on park benches marked "For Whites Only," rises above her pain and makes her way to one of the only places in the city that welcomes her with open arms: the public library.

Main Selection 3:

Spirit of Endurance by Jennifer Armstrong.

This distillation of Armstrong's *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World* into picture book format masterfully foreshortens the key events of Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated expedition aboard the *Endurance* to Antarctica. Trapped in pack ice in January 1915, Shackleton and his crew survived for nearly a year in the frozen polar wasteland, and then traveled 100 miles by open lifeboat to an uninhabited islet. Shackleton and a handpicked team sailed a further 800 miles "across the stormiest ocean in the world, facing 100-foot waves, bitter temperatures, and hurricane-force winds," then trekked across the uncharted mountains and glaciers of South Georgia Island to a whaling station. After several attempts, Shackleton took a Chilean steamer back to the islet and saved every member of his crew. Although the opening is a bit abrupt, Armstrong's account of these astonishing feats of fortitude ripples with drama. Only those who have read her longer version of the events will miss the copious quotes that capture the voices of the men and the colorful anecdotes (e.g., Hussey's banjo serenades) she brings so vividly to life in *Shipwreck*. The book's oversize format hints at the scope of Shackleton's larger-than-life adventure and provides a generous frame for an ample supply of maps, original photographs (including the famous shot of the ice-bound *Endurance*, her hull and rigging covered with a ghostly white frost) and Maughan's panoramic, wide-view paintings. The paintings cannot rival the intrinsic fascination of the photographs, but they are atmospheric and imposingly scaled.

Main Selection 4:

The Unbreakable Code by Sara Hoagland Hunter.

John, a young Navajo, is frightened to leave his lifelong home on the reservation and move to Minnesota with his mother and new stepfather. The boy's grandfather assures him he will be all right since he has an "unbreakable code," the Navajo language. The man goes on to tell the story of how he and other Navajos were recruited by the Marines and developed a message code based on their native

language that helped the U.S. in the Pacific during World War II. After the story, John feels less tentative about his move because his grandfather "taught him who he was and what he would always have with him." The narrative melds nicely with the oil paintings, which adeptly depict the Southwestern landscape and the military scenes. Tables that show the original alphabetical code and some highlighted military terms are appended. The Unbreakable Code presents an interesting part of World War II history that traditionally has received little attention.

Individual Selections:

- *Susan B Anthony: Making Her Mark on the Women's Right Movement* by Luke Jordan. A short story about women's voting rights highlighting Susan B. Anthony's role and contribution. Summarizes major events in the fight for voting rights for women and how Anthony influenced change. Character traits/Character study.
- *Grandpop's Brave Choice* by Richard B. Henry. A realistic fiction short story about the civil rights struggle in America. A young boy accompanies his grandfather as he votes in his first ever election. Along the way, they encounter opposition and obstacles. Grandfather displays courage under fire and impresses his grandson.
- *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges. Surrounded by federal marshals, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first black student ever at the all-white William Frantz Public School in New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 14, 1960. Throughout the book, readers will find quotes from newspapers of the time, family members, and teachers and a fascinating update on Bridges's life and civil rights work. A personal, deeply moving historical documentary about a staggeringly courageous little girl at the center of events that already seem unbelievable.
- *Role Models: Examples of Character & Leadership* by Joseph M. Hoedel. *Role Models: Examples of Character and Leadership*, highlights 17 individuals who each exemplify a different character trait including: perseverance, respect, honesty, attitude, integrity, courage, and tolerance to name a few. This book offers a mix of historical figures that have stood the test of time like Amelia Earhart, Booker T. Washington and Helen Keller, as well as contemporary figures that are worthy of our admiration, such as Tiger Woods, Christopher Reeve and Oprah Winfrey.

After reading all the above selections, the checklist created at the beginning, will be refined and finalized. The final checklist will be used when the students do their preliminary interviews to find worthy role model “candidates.”

Phase 2

This phase of the unit requires some study on the part of the teacher. This is the portion of the unit where we as the teacher have to explain what oral history is. Before taking my oral history class, I believed that I had a solid idea of what oral history was. However, I was sadly mistaken. Oral history encompasses so many different facets that it hardly has a solid definition at all.

In Donald A Ritchie’s *Doing Oral History*, the author states that memory is the core of oral history from which meaning can be extracted and preserved. Oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. In other words, a well-prepared interviewer asks questions that they deem significantly relevant to unfold the depths of memory. Historical significance is all in the eye of the beholder. It is up to the interviewer to capture information that is germane and relatable to the mission of the interview.

Here lays the obstacle. How do we explain to our students what oral history is? The beauty of oral history is that it works for teachers who have grown exhausted of lecturing to their students and want to engage them in learning that is more active. Therefore, if we supply a general outline of what oral history is, the students can, more or less, teach themselves. Isn’t that beautiful? Instead of us telling students what is important, it is up to them to process and analyze information and make judgments of importance on their own.

The first step in this process is having the students develop a general idea of what oral history is. This process can begin by simply telling your students about a game you played when you were a child (or any story that you can remember from childhood). I find that my students are simply *captivated* when I tell them stories about my childhood. They find it hilarious. As you tell the story about your childhood game, make sure you give as many details as possible. Make sure you emphasize that this is apart of your history and that all of us have a history of our own. Point out that *not all history is* written in a book. Ask your students how history that is not in our textbooks can be shared. I hope that this will spark a discussion that will lead the students to conclude that history can be passed down through oral expression.

Your next step is to ask your students if they could summarize or relay your childhood story that you just gave back to you. More than likely, they will have missed some of the details. Ask them to generate some ideas as to how they could have been able to give the story back to you with more details. Lead them in the direction that if they had recorded the information, that they would be able to retain it longer. Explain to them that everyone's history is very important to each individual. Have a short discussion as to why it would be important to make sure you got the details right of your story. In this discussion, it is important to accentuate those mistakes when relaying details could change the history. Pose this question/idea: "Rosa Parks is the symbol of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. If I were to ask a witness on the bus the day she refused to give up her seat and they told me that she actually *did* give up her seat, how would that change history?" If your students are not aware of this historical event, use one that is more relevant to you. You could even use a common fairy tale and change the ending. It is just central that you make sure the students understand that it is important to get the details right.

After your discussion of "getting the details right", write the words *oral history* on the board. Tell your students that they have just defined what oral history is without even knowing it. As a class, make a consensus definition as to what oral history is. Make sure the definition includes elements of the idea that oral history is verbally transmitted information about past events, often providing valuable information about non-written events, and usually recorded to be past down.

The next couple of days will involve having the students listen to examples of oral history (passive oral history). Invite the students to develop further their definition of what oral history is. In the bibliography, I have included a list of oral history websites that include oral history interviews. Listen to the interviews ahead of time and pick the ones that best suit your students. With my population of students, I have chosen interviews based on vocabulary usage and content. I want the students to understand the interviews without frustration, which means limiting the amount of extraneous information that may cause confusion.

Phase 3

This phase of the unit focuses on developing interview skills and the interview itself. Pittsburgh Public Schools have adopted the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures Reading/Language Arts Program. Within the 5th grade curriculum, there is a generic lesson geared toward the writing of an interview (Unit 4, Week 5). It is a five-day writing process lesson. In the appendices I have included worksheets (that can be made into transparencies) to include in the five-day lesson. I have altered the lessons slightly to better fit the needs of my students. Here is a general outline of that five-day lesson:

- *Day 1: Purpose and Audience*
 - Discuss the purpose of an interview. One purpose is to learn about a person and their life.
 - Discuss *who* the audience is. Explain to the student that the audience differs depending on the topic of the interview. In this instance, their audience will be their classmate.
 - Discuss that good writers keep their audience in mind. The best writing makes readers feel as though the writer is talking directly to them.
 - Have the students interview you about the story that you told them during phase two. Have them come up with four questions to ask. Fill out the transparency accordingly (APPENDIX A).

Day 2: Drafting Interview

- Display the transparency from the Day 1 lesson. Discuss how we can use our chart to plan an interview.
 - Remind students that the interview will be presented in a question-and-answer format.
 - Display the Day 2 transparency (APPENDIX B). Fill out according to the questions/answers from previous lesson.
 - Tell students to that they will be paired up to interview each other, using the worksheet from Day 1. Their topic will be *what is your favorite time of year?*
 - Review the features of an interview. Questions should follow in a logical sequence. Answers should use words spoken by the person being interviewed
 - Encourage students to prepare questions in advance
 - Emphasize that students can pick and choose the questions to include
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- *Day 3: Interview Partners*
 - Students will interview their partners using their questions prepared from the day before. Emphasize that the students use the *exact* words spoken by the person being interviewed. Have students use worksheet from Day 1 (APPENDIX A) for interview.
 - Have students begin their interview writing drafts following the Day 2 question-and-answer format.
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- *Day 4: Revise/Edit*
 - Review students worksheets from the previous days
 - Discuss how questions can be made clear and interesting
 - Discuss how questions can be combined if answers are repeated.
 - Discuss when to decide if words are unnecessary and should be eliminated.
 - Have students revise and edit their question-and-answer writing drafts. Make sure students pay close attention to sequencing of questions, check for colons after Q and A, use commas after introductory words like *yes* and *no*, and check all capitalization/punctuation.
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- *Day 5: Publish and Present*

- To publish their writing, students should make a neat final copy using their handwriting or a computer.
- Recommend that partners take turns reading their interviews to each other.
- To evaluate student writing, use the 4-point Scoring Rubric (APPENDIX C). This rubric can be used in final project evaluation as well.

Now that the students have a general idea of what an interview is and how to conduct one, it is time to refine the art. This is where we use application activities and games to get the needed concepts out of our students. As mentioned in the overview, there are three types of questions that I want my students to develop: *factual*, *descriptive*, and *evaluation*. These types of questions can be further simplified and defined as *specific*, *open-ended*, and *follow-up questions*. Use the terminology you feel is most appropriate for your students.

Factual questions (specific) are questions that elicit basic facts from the interviewee. These questions are usually short, one word/simple phrased answers or yes-no responses. *Descriptive questions* (open-ended) are questions that need answers that contain definitional information about the search term or describe some special events. They elicit information about broad experiences. These questions would require the interviewee to fill in details about his or her life. *Evaluation questions* are questions that require the interviewee to think further in depth about a question/response. These questions can be considered “give me more” questions. They compel the subject to evaluate their responses and respond accordingly.

In her article, *Oral History Projects in the Elementary Classroom*, Kathryn Walbert describes an activity that can help students differentiate between the types of questions.

Here’s an activity: Ask students to write questions in three separate categories. *Factual questions* invite the interview to share factual details. For example, “When and where were you born?” or “What was the name of your school?” *Descriptive questions* ask the interviewee to fill in details about his or her life. For example,

“Describe a typical day of school when you were seven,” or “How did your family divide up the chores that needed to be done around the house?” *Evaluation questions* urge the interviewee to evaluate, explain, or discuss the meaning of events from his or her past. For example, “What relative had the greatest influence on your life when you were my age?” or “Why do you think people were so upset when President John F. Kennedy was killed?” “How did you feel as you watched the astronaut take his first steps on the moon?”

(3)

To modify this activity for my students, I would include several key elements. I would first have a discussion on the three types of questions and make a consensus definition that is kid friendly. The students could write these definitions and include them in their binder. I would then go on to elaborate the pros and cons of different kind of questions. A simple demonstration of this would be to a student, “Did you like 4th grade?” Allow them to respond. Then ask the question “What did you like best about 4th grade?” The latter question is likely to yield a more interesting response. Have the students compare and contrast the responses (for students who are more visual, I would use a Venn diagram on the board). Have them try to verbalize why each question merited a different response. These discussions would be preliminary to the actual activity.

In addition to the above activity, I would include a worksheet (APPENDIX B), on which the students could write examples of the types of questions. Students with learning disabilities work best when they have strategies that keep them organized and merit importance. Providing an actual worksheet, as opposed to a piece of paper, gives a sense of magnitude and elicits the student to believe that it is of value. Therefore, they will be more apt to keep it safe and refer to it when needed.

The students will also work in groups. These groups will be carefully organized so that the strengths of each group member creates a powerful team. This will also help in ensuring that there are several questions in each category.

More people, more ideas. This exercise will repeat in the next phase; however, it will be geared specifically to the goal of interviewing role models.

Phase 4

We are now ready to begin our oral history project. This requires students to recall information from the past phases, critically analyze, and process it.

Explain to the students that they are going to be “role model researchers.” Their goal is to find male role models in the community. Emphasize that community includes people from their neighborhood, their school, coaches, family, family, friends, etc. Have students pull out the role model checklist created in Phase 1. Review the traits that the class chose. Have students generate a list of people that would possible fit the criteria.

If you have students that may not have a person in mind, it is good to have resources that you can pull from. There are always cases in which students may not have people they can interview. We do not want to discourage the students or give them cause for anxiety. We want all of our students to be able to participate, and it is our job to provide them with the opportunity to do so. In the bibliography, I have included a list of community resources that can provide you with people for the students to interview. In the appendix, I have also included a draft of a letter/email that can be sent to organizations in order for you to recruit interviewees. It is also common sense to pull from your own school. Many of the men on your staff would be an ideal source to use as interviewees. More than likely, they fit the criteria, and you can schedule their interview during their prep!

Make clear to your students that this portion of the project requires them to do a preliminary scanning to see if they can find appropriate role models. Tell them to think of it as a scavenger hunt. With checklist in hand, explain to the students that they will need to find someone that fits 80% of the character traits listed. To do this, they must use the checklist as a guideline and make up questions that “uncovers” whether their subject meets the criteria. The students will need to ask questions that help them fish out the answers they seek. Pair the

students into partners or small groups to brainstorm the type of questions that they will ask. The questions must correspond to the checklist. Make sure they keep in mind the three types of questions discussed earlier and which types would elicit the best answer to find out the require information. Give the students 10-15 minutes to come up with a list of questions. Have the group reconvene and discuss the types of questions that they have come up with. Write *all* the questions on a piece of chart paper (we will revisit this chart later). Have the students, as individuals, pick the questions they wish to use on their scavenger hunt.

The students will be given a week to two weeks to find an appropriate male role model. This gives the students a chance to really focus on finding a role model that fits the mold and fits their personal preferences. It also allows the teacher time to get role model “replacements” for those students that may be unable to attain an interviewee. Remind the students to give their role model the cover letter (APPENDIX H). The cover letter will explain the project and serves as a contract of sorts. It allows the role models to know what they are signing up for and it signifies the importance of the project. Nothing symbolizes importance like a note from the teacher’s desk!

Once students have found appropriate role models to interview, it is now up to the students to develop questions that will be asked during the interview. Remind the students that the goal is qualify this person as a role model. Therefore, the questions asked must prove that and give explanation. Also, make them aware that while they may have questions prepared ahead of time, they may think of questions during that the interview that they think are relevant. Tell them not to fight that urge to ask questions that are not on the list.

Once again, group the students into pairs or small groups. Using the worksheet from Phase 3 that organizes the types of questions, have the students brainstorm questions that fit all three categories. However, make sure you stress that descriptive and evaluation questions will be more beneficial for them later, because they will be using the interview to create writing pieces (alternative projects will be mentioned later in order to differentiate for diverse populations).

While the students are developing their questions, circulate to make sure they are on the right track. Some groups or pairings will finish before others. Meet with the groups as they finish and have them role play/perform mock interviews with you. Make sure you develop opportunities for them to ask questions that are not on the list. Point out opportunities in which they could swerve away from the planned questions. Point out that as long as the questions are relevant to the topic, it is ok for them to develop questions on the spot.

After a couple of days of performing mock interviews with the students, and when you think the students are comfortable with the interview format, it is time to invite the role models in for interviews. Depending on your schedule and the schedule of the role models, this may take several days or several weeks. Aim for trying to get as many interviews done as quickly as possible, in the shortest amount of time possible. We do not want the students to lose interest in the project.

Phase 5

Once you have scheduled the appointments, the interview questions are ready, the kids are racing to go, you may ask yourself, “How am I supposed to record these interviews?” You *should* be asking yourself that. I have several ideas in mind that can benefit a diverse cross section of educators.

Acquiring audio equipment on limited school budget calls for creativity. Hand held tape recorders are inexpensive and easy to use. If you have one, you are good to go. Since the interviews will be done individually, you will only need that one tape recorder. If this is not possible, it is always smart to look for resources within your school. Some school audiovisual departments will sometimes have recorders, microphones, and video camera. However, please prepare yourself for the unfortunate fate that you may find a complete lack of equipment or severe limitation to its availability. You can also poll your students and see if they may audio equipment available (tape recorders, video cameras, mini disks, etc). Some may have access to family recorders. You can also poll

your local community centers, your school PTA/PTO, local merchants, local universities, etc.

Another idea that I recently stumbled across was using an iPod. Your iPod can be used as a recorder if you purchase a compatible, separate microphone adaptor. iTunes even has a free editing application that allows you to convert and edit materials so they can be played as mp3 files. Many of my students have iPods (as do I), so this may be a reliable option.

Typically, the best recording quality will be achieved by using a tape recorder with some form of external microphone. Keep this in mind before conducting the interviews. You may want to do some test runs to test the sound quality of the microphone and the acoustics in the room. I also suggest scheduling the interviews during class periods when there is limited noise and an area that is free of as much extraneous noise as possible. The outside noise will affect the sound quality, and you may not have another opportunity to do the interviews.

Now that you have found equipment, scheduled the appointments, students have interview questions ready, clean your classroom! We want to make a good impression on these role models. I would also talk to my students about making a good impression. Pittsburgh Miller is a uniform school. I would suggest that the students wear their best uniforms on the day of their interviews, or even allow them to dress up in a professional manner. Many of my students will be attending University Prep in their sixth grade year. They are required to wear professional dress at the school. This will give the students an opportunity to practice.

Phase 6

After all the interviews are conducted, have the students write thank you notes to the role models. In the note, include that they are invited back to see the results of the project. Also mention that the presentation of the project end pieces will take

place during a luncheon in their honor (men love to eat and they *really* love free food).

Allow the students to listen to all the interviews. Engage the students in a discussion about each interview and whether these people were truly role models and why. Have the students critique the interviews, pointing out what went well and what could be improved upon. Compare and contrast the different interviewees.

Each student will be required to use their individual interviews to summarize them in writing. The topic of each piece will be for the students to qualify in words why their subject is an appropriate male role model. Each essay will be different depending on the writer and the interview that took place.

For those students whose writing skills are not developed enough to create a writing piece, they have several options. The first option is to create a photo collage that represents their role model and incorporate interview themes. They will have to present their collage during the luncheon and explain the aspects of their collage. Another option could be for the student to prepare an oral presentation where they play excerpts from their interview and discuss them with the class. A final option would require a student to write and perform a dramatic performance based on their interviewee's stories. All students could be given the option of doing one of these four summative projects (including the essay).

As a gift to the students and the role models, a point presentation will be created encompassing the phases that the students have gone through. The power point will include artifacts from each phase including interview clips, writing pieces, worksheets, collages and pictures (I am a photo happy teacher. Kodak loves me).

Bibliography

Chadwick, Fran. "Connecting the Past to the Present for Students with Special Needs." Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians. Ed. Barry A. Lanman. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006.

This is an article allowed the special educator to see practical practices that can be used for students with learning disabilities. It outlines general activities that can be adapted to the learner. It also points out the pitfalls special educators run into and how they can be prevented.

Engberg, John, Brian Gill. "Estimating Graduation and Dropout Rates with Longitudinal Data: A Case Study in the Pittsburgh Public Schools" RAND Education, July 2006

A longitudinal data study of the drop out rates of our students. I used this information to support the need of mentoring programs within our school district.

Hoedel, Joseph M. Role Models: Examples of Character and Leadership. Greensboro, NC: Character Development Group, Inc, 2005.

Examples of Character and Leadership, highlights 17 individuals who each exemplify a different character trait including: perseverance, respect, honesty, attitude, integrity, courage, and tolerance to name a few.

Lanman, Barry A., Wendling, Laura M. Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians: An Anthology of Oral History Education Oral History Education, Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006.

Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians is an invaluable resource to educators seeking to bring history alive for students at all levels. Filled with

insightful reflections on teaching oral history, it offers practical suggestions for educators seeking to create curricula, engage students, gather community support, and meet educational standards.

Ladner, Joyce A. Launching Our Black Children for Success: A Guide for Parents of Kids from Three to Eighteen. San Francisco, Ca: Jossey-Bass, 2003

Launching Our Black Children for Success is a groundbreaking book that goes beyond the typical "how to get your kid into the best school or college" advice. This extraordinary book takes parents step-by-step through the stages of child development so they can build a solid foundation for success in their children.

Musgrove, J.B. "Perceived experiences of youth participants in a rural, community-based adult mentoring program." Dissertation Abstracts International, 59(2-A); 0426

This study shows the benefits of mentoring programs, from the prospective of the mentee, through data collections, surveys, and observations by educators, community members, and volunteers.

Ritchie, Donald A. Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003

Doing Oral History is a definitive step-by-step guide that provides advice and explanations on how to create recordings that illuminate human experience for generations to come.

Rowland, R.G. "An evaluation of the effects of a mentoring program on at-risk students in selected elementary school in the North East Independent School District" Dissertation Abstracts International, 53:39.

This study breaks the benefits of mentoring programs into categories and illuminates the cause and effects of each category.

Walbert, Kathryn. "Oral History Projects in the Elementary Classroom." Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians. Ed. Barry A. Lanman, Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006

This article is a practical guide on how oral history can be used at the elementary level. It gives several examples of what can be done and how they can be assessed.

Watkins, A.M., D.P. Kurtz. "Using solution-focused intervention to address African American males in special education: A case study. Children & Schools, 23(4), 223-235.

An article that highlights strategies and interventions that occur before African-American males are placed into special education classrooms. Highlights the overrepresentation of African Americans and the causes.

Whitman, Glenn. Dialogue with the Past: Engaging Students and Meeting Standards through Oral History. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004

This book is filled with useful tips, examples from students and teachers, and reproducible forms, along with an comprehensive bibliography, that helps anyone working with students to plan and carryout oral history projects"

Notes

- 1 Lanman, Barry A., Wendling, Laura M. Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians: An Anthology of Oral History Education Oral History Education, Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006.

- 2 Rowland, R.G. “An evaluation of the effects of a mentoring program on at-risk students in selected elementary school in the North East Independent School District” Dissertation Abstracts International, 53:39.

- 3 Walbert, Kathryn. “Oral History Projects in the Elementary Classroom.” Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians. Ed. Barry A. Lanman, Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006

Mentor Resources

www.100blackmentofwesternpa.org

The website of an organization that seeks to serve as a beacon of leadership to create environments for children to achieve. The group offers mentor programs and guest speakers when needed.

www.hillhouse.org/main.php

A comprehensive community service provider and facilitator that meet the needs of Hill District residents and diverse constituents in the Greater Pittsburgh region

www.bbbspgh.org

Big Brothers Big Sisters matches children ages 6 through 18 with mentors in professionally supported one-to-one relationships. We have volunteer programs in communities across the country

www.mentoringpittsburgh.org

This online directory is a compilation of mentoring programs offered to youth in Allegheny County and the surrounding area.

www.interfaithworks.org/projects-wesley.html

The Wesley Center A.M.E. Zion Church, located in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, provides many valuable outreach programs to the neighboring community. These programs include after-school enrichment for youths, mentoring to older students, senior citizen programs and much more.

www.ymcaofpgh.org : Y Achievers program

The Y Achievers program assists young people in setting and attaining post secondary goals. Students, grades 9th-12th, are inspired to explore options and reach their full potential through counseling, training and exposure to the business world through a variety of career environments. The program reaches out into the Pittsburgh community utilizing the talents of outstanding adult men and women, who become role models for participants, and gain exposure to the business world in a variety of career environments, called career clusters.

Oral History Resources

www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher_resources/

www.storycorps.org/listen/

<http://content.wsulibs.wsu.edu/Holland/MASC/xcivilrights.html>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

www.lib.usm.edu/~spcol/crda/

Standards

- 1.1. Learning to Read Independently**
- 1.2. Reading Critically in All Content Areas**
- 1.3. Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature**
- 1.4. Types of Writing**

1.5. Quality of Writing

1.6. Speaking and Listening

Appendix A

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Questions	Answers

Appendix B

Name _____

Interview Format: Question and Answer

Q: _____

A:

Q: _____

A:

Q: _____

A:

Q: _____

A:

Q: _____

A:

Appendix C

Name: _____ Score/Grade: _____

Scoring Rubric

4 Excellent	3 Good	2 Fair	1 Unsatisfactory
<p>Ideas and Content</p> <p>Interview features good questions about topic; answer are complete</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Ideas and Content</p> <p>Interview features good questions; most relate to topic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Ideas and Content</p> <p>Many questions and answers do not relate to topic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Ideas and Content</p> <p>Questions and answers have no focus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Organization</p> <p>Questions in logical order</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Organization</p> <p>Most questions appear in correct order</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Organization</p> <p>Many questions out of order; answers not always clear</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Organization</p> <p>No order to questions; answers incomplete or unclear</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Voice</p> <p>Personality of the subject being interviewed is conveyed through writing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Voice</p> <p>Subject's thoughts and feelings about the topic are conveyed through writing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Voice</p> <p>Few clues to personality, thoughts, or feelings of the interview subject</p>	<p>Voice</p> <p>Voice of person being interviewed is missing</p>

		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Word Choice</p> <p>Informal, conversational words appropriate to an interview</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Word Choice</p> <p>Appropriate words used accurately</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Word Choice</p> <p>Words are too formal or academic; some terms used incorrectly</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Word Choice</p> <p>Uses words inappropriately; same words used repetitively</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Sentence Fluency</p> <p>Uses a variety of sentence lengths and types</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Sentence Fluency</p> <p>Uses long and short sentences</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Sentence Fluency</p> <p>Sentences fragmented; some run-on sentences</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Sentence Fluency</p> <p>Incomplete or confusing sentences</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Conventions</p> <p>Mostly free of errors in spelling, mechanics, and usage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Conventions</p> <p>Few errors in usage, spelling, and mechanics</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Conventions</p> <p>Many errors in spelling, usage, and mechanics</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Conventions</p> <p>Repeated errors in spelling, mechanics, and usage.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>

Appendix D

Name _____

Types of Questions

Factual	Descriptive	Evaluation

Appendix E

Name _____

“Role Model” Character Analysis

Role Model Character:

1. Give a brief summary of the story:

2. Briefly describe the situation/event in the story that revealed the character as a role model.

3. Name four character traits that make the character a role model

➤ _____

➤ _____

➤ _____

➤ _____

Appendix G

Name _____

Role Model Interview Questions

1. (Factual) _____

2. (Factual) _____

3. (Factual) _____

4. (Descriptive)

5. (Descriptive)

6. (Descriptive)

7. (Evaluation)

8. (Evaluation)

9. (Evaluation)

Dana R. Williams
Pittsburgh Miller
2055 Bedford Ave
Pittsburgh, Pa 15219

December 17, 2009

Dear Sir,

My name is Dana Williams. I am the Learning Support teacher at Pittsburgh Miller. My students are working on an oral history project. The goal of the project is to find male role models in the community. If you are reading this letter, then you have been selected by one of my students as a positive male role model. Congrats!

I am in need of your help. To complete their project, the students need to perform an interview. That is where you come in. If you are willing to allow my student to interview you, please leave your name and contact information at the bottom. I will set up a convenient time for you to come to the school and be interviewed. If you are unable to help, but know of any one else that could possibly be interviewed, please contact me. If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with me at the number above. Thank you in advance for all of your help and for being a stand out in the eyes of my student.

Sincerely,

Dana R. Williams
Learning Support Teacher
K-5 Pittsburgh Miller

I AGREE to be interviewed, please contact me!

Name: _____ Number:

I DO NOT AGREE to be interviewed.

Appendix I

Interview Contract

In view of the historical value of this oral history interview,

I _____ (name of interviewee) knowingly and voluntarily permit this student

_____ (name of student interviewer),

of _____ (name of class and school) the full use of this information for educational purposes. This audio recording may become part of a classroom collection of oral history tapes, to be used this year and in the future.

Signature _____

(signature of the interviewee)

Date _____

(date of interview)