INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIT

In this sequential lesson series, students can be guided through the process of writing an autobiography and will use personal photographs to shape their stories. This lesson is framed around Owney the postal dog, whose story is illustrated through the teacher’s modeling and optional monitoring of Owney Facebook and Twitter posts. This unit plan provides personal photographs and “first-hand accounts” of Owney’s adventures for the teacher to use as a tool for modeling Owney’s stories for the students. Students will be assessed during and at the end of the unit through worksheets and rubric developed by readwritethink.org.

STORIES :: LESSONS

1. students will be able to use descriptive language to explain photographs
2. students will write descriptive details about personal photography
1. How can we use pictures to tell stories?
2. What can we tell other people about ourselves through writing?
3. How do we write about ourselves?

Supporting Standards of Learning are available at: http://www.postalmuseumblog.si.edu/owneycurriculum/Owney_SOLS.pdf

TEACHER RESOURCES

- Blogs from Owney’s experiences: www.postalmuseumblog.si.edu/owney
- Historic resources from Owney www.npm.si.edu/owney
- You Have to Write by Janet S. Wong
- Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst
- Diary of a Worm by Doreen Cronin
- Owney Tweets: https://twitter.com/OWNEYtheDOG
- Owney Facebook posts: http://www.facebook.com/Owney
LESSON 1 :: CREATING YOUR STORY

Lesson Duration: 45 minute lesson with homework time for writing.

Objective
Students will be able to use descriptive language to explain photographs.

Key points
• An autobiography is a story about one’s life written by that person.
• A biography is a story written about someone else’s life.
• Photographs tell us about a specific time in our lives and can help tell a bigger story.

Assessment
Students will complete “Information about My Photos” for Owney photos and photos of themselves.
Opening ❋
Read Aloud: *You Have to Write*. Ask students how they would use the ideas from this book to write about themselves and other comprehension questions.

Guided Practice ❋
- Explain that an autobiography is a story about one’s life written by that person. Ask students to share ideas about what they would write about in their own lives. Collect ideas on chart paper.
- Model for students how to gather information about a person or animal. Explain that the students are going to write about Owney. Gather artifacts from Owney’s life including pictures, tags, newspaper articles, and text from his Facebook and Twitter account. Explain to students that they can gather and then organize information about their lives in order to write an autobiography. Explain that today they will focus on what pictures can tell us about Owney’s life and their lives. Show students how to answer the following questions about pictures:
  - In this photograph I am . . .
  - The thing I like about this photograph is . . .
  - This photograph was taken . . . (time and place)

Independent Practice ❋
Students will choose four different photos of Owney. Students will then use the “Information about My Photos” worksheet to describe Owney’s photographs.

Differentiation: Provide a Venn Diagram that lists the features that are unique to a biography and an autobiography and what features are similar. This will provide a visual reference to the students on the difference between the two types of stories.

Closing ❋
- Students’ photographs and descriptions will be put together in the class book about Owney.
- Explain to students that they will have to complete this process for photographs of themselves. Students should choose pictures of themselves and complete the same worksheet. This can be done in the same class period, over night for homework, or the next day.

Materials
- *You Have to Write* by Wong
- Pictures of students
- Chart paper, markers
- Owney pictures worksheet [http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/owneycurriculum/worksheets.html](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/owneycurriculum/worksheets.html)
- Venn Diagram worksheet
LESSON 2 :: IDEAS FOR YOUR STORY

Lesson Duration: 30 minutes with homework time for writing.

Objective
Students will be able to write descriptive details about personal photography in order to build an autobiography.

Key points
• Photographs can tell a bigger story.
• Descriptive details help someone understand what is going on.

Assessment
Students will complete “Ideas for My Story” worksheet with at least three details about each photograph.

Opening
Students will pair/share with a partner their photographs and personal “Information about My Photos” from Lesson 1. Remind students that they are all contributing to a story about Owney. Explain the difference between students’ autobiographies and the class biography of Owney.
Guided Practice

- Explain to students that they will use their photographs as a starting point to write a story about their life. Use their writing to highlight details of a photograph so they can start putting together a story.
- Model for students by placing a photograph in the center and writing details about each photograph (like in a scrapbook). Use pictures of Owney to model how the story will be written (for class biography).

Independent Practice

Students will use “Ideas for My Story” worksheet to brainstorm details about each photograph.

Differentiation: Provide a manila file folder as an organization tool for the information and photos for the student’s autobiography. The folder should be labeled with the required elements on an envelope that has been glued to the manila folder. The student can take notes on index cards and place them into each envelope.

Closing

Students should create an Autobiography folder to contain their photographs, “Information about My Photos,” and “Ideas for My Story” worksheets. There should be a separate folder for Owney Biography materials.

Materials

- Chart, markers
- Owney photograph worksheet
- Ideas For My Story Worksheet [link]
- Autobiography folders for each student and Owney
Lesson 3 :: Whose Story? Your Story!

Lesson Duration: 30 minutes with homework time for writing.

Objective
Students will be able to write first person sentences about personal photographs.

Key points
- First person sentences use words like “I” and “me”.
- An autobiography should give someone your personal account of what happened in a photograph.

Assessment
Students must write 2–3 descriptive sentences in first person about each photograph.
**Opening**
Have students form small groups and share their autobiography ideas from their “Ideas for My Story” worksheet from Lesson 2. Have students contribute details or suggestions to their peers’ work.

**Guided Practice**
• Remind students that an autobiography is something we write about ourselves. Explain that each sentence in their story should be in first person. Give students some examples by reading quotations from Owney’s Facebook and Twitter pages. Explain that these sites allow us to share information about ourselves and these quotations are first person from Owney. Have examples of Owney writing about pictures on these sites.

• Ask students what the quotations have in common (focusing on first person language). Have students contribute sentence starters to a class list. Model for students how these first person sentences can match photographs by using Owney as an example:

  When I was a baby I liked to . . .
  My favorite food is . . .
  I remember when I . . .
  I love to . . .
  In this picture, I am . . .
  I can’t believe I . . .

**Independent Practice**
Students will complete “An Autobiography: Planning My Story” worksheet. Students will write sentences in first person for each photograph.

**Differentiation**: Provide support as needed during the guided practice to the students as they brainstorm and provide feedback to each other. Graphic organizers, editing checklists and spelling aids are very effective in writing tasks.

**Closing**
Students should add “Planning My Story” worksheet to their autobiography folder. This is a good time to check students’ folders for complete work and enough sentences describing each picture. Offer feedback on story ideas, sentences, and work completed so far. Have students make any changes or adjustments based on your feedback.

**Materials**
• Owney quotations from Facebook and Twitter pages
• Chart paper, markers
Lesson 4 :: Writing Your Story

Lesson Duration: 30 minutes with homework time for writing.

Objective
Students will be able to write a story centered on descriptions of personal photographs.

Key points
• We can tell stories about ourselves by describing personal photographs.
• People can learn more about our lives from an autobiography.

Assessment
Students will be graded using Our Stories Rubric.

Opening
Read Aloud: Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. Ask questions about how Alexander feels and how students know that. Encourage students to use evidence from the book like the dialogue and pictures.
Guided Practice ❖

- Review what an autobiography is with students. Explain that the book is told in first person, just like an autobiography. Review how things that Alexander says in the book support the pictures.

- Have students work as a class to write a story about Owney using previous materials (interactive writing). Highlight first person vocabulary so students can see examples. Remind students of their previous lesson where they had pre-written sentences for each picture. Show the previous work from the class’s Owney folder.

Independent Practice ❖

Students will combine their photographs and sentences for a complete autobiography. Students should use the autobiography page to complete this project.

Differentiation: Provide a word bank with descriptive words and examples of super sentences the students can use as a guide when writing their sentences. Graphic organizers, editing checklists and spelling aids are very effective in writing tasks.

Closing ❖

- Explain to students that they will finish their stories in the next lesson.

- They will have to choose if they will turn their story into a book or a comic book on paper or online. Show examples.

Materials

- Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Viorst

- Sample sentences for Owney story and/or chart paper and makers for interactive writing

- Autobiography page Worksheet

- Our Stories Rubric
  http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/owneycurriculum/Owney_Lessons_Rubric.pdf
Lesson 5 :: Sharing Your Story

Lesson Duration: 30 minutes with additional time for publishing party

Objective
Students will create a final copy of their autobiography for a publishing party. Students will either create an autobiographical novel, comic book, on paper or online.

Key points
• We publish a story when we are completely done working on it.
• Stories about people can come in many different styles and forms.
• The style of a story affects readers’ understanding.

Assessment
Students will be graded using the Our Stories Rubric or the Our Stories Comic Book Rubric.
Opening
Read Aloud: *Diary of a Worm* by Cronin. Ask students questions about Worm. Complete a character map to record details.

Guided Practice
• Share with students a completed story about Owney (or comic book).
• Have students complete their stories so they are ready to be published. Make sure students have materials needed for each kind of story.
• Show materials for regular story book: completed Autobiography pages, dedication page, Self-Portrait Cover page
• Show materials for comic book: completed Autobiography pages, Comic Book templates, dedication page, cover page
• Show materials for webpage: completed photo layout, dedication screen, cover page.

Independent Practice
Students will choose how they want to complete their stories for publication. They will need to complete all the additional pages for their kind of story. Students who finish early may choose to read a friend’s story.

Differentiation: Using technology to create and publish a story in several different formats is a great way to differentiate for students. Using word prediction software to write stories provides great support for those students with writing weaknesses. There are comic strip templates available that are free of charge and user friendly.

The Our Stories unit is derived from “See the Young Children Write Autobiographies” lesson by Melissa Weimer, provided by ReadWriteThink.org, a Thinkfinity website developed by the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and in partnership with the Verizon Foundation.

Closing
Celebrate finishing your stories with a Publishing Party. Students should each have a chance to share their stories with classmates.

Materials
• *Diary of a Worm* by Cronin
• Autobiography folder (all completed pages and pictures)
• Dedication and Cover pages
• Party supplies
• Our Stories and Comic Book rubrics
  http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/owneycurriculum/Owney_Lessons_Rubric.pdf