Text Set

**Topic: Reading and Writing Nonfiction**

**Overview:**

The process of choosing the books I chose for my text set began with my choice examination of a 9th grade English textbook used across the nation. In Holt, Rinehart and Winston’s *Elements of Literature: Third Course* there is a section teaching about the different styles of nonfiction. In the text, there are poems, essays, speeches, narratives and persuasive text which are all exemplary of nonfiction. What I noticed was that most of these nonfiction pieces were the classics; they were the same famous classics that I had studied in school. I also noted that at the end of the reading materials students are questioned or given writing prompts based on what they have read. Holt, Rinehart and Winston also provide worksheets for the teacher to use to further the reading comprehension and begin writing assignments.

With my text set I wanted to do much of the same things in representing different styles of nonfiction, but with a different spin on it. I wanted to include more modern texts, texts of today with which students could relate. I wanted to provide books that students could refer to when needing extra help in writing, and to give them new kind of reading and writing inspiration beyond what is given on a worksheet. My text set would do well to go along with the textbooks used in an English classroom as far as clarifying lessons in a way that is meaningful to students. The books I chose range in reading ability from the 5th grade reading level to about the 11th grade. I was careful to select lower level reading material that was still interesting for students of all skill levels. I plan on implementing the more difficult texts in methods that will benefit both the advanced and struggling readers.

*Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul:*
*Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* is a book of collected narratives, poems and essays all about experiences growing up. The stories are real, honest, poignant, and entertaining for readers of all ages. The editors who compiled these works into a collection were aiming to teach teenagers that they are not alone in what they are experiencing, that others are going through many of the same emotions in coming of age. Celebrities such as Jennifer Love Hewitt and Bill Cosby also contributed to this collection of essays and reflections.

This strongly relates to my content area in how it is exemplary of the genre of creative nonfiction. The book includes narratives, poetry and opinion pieces, all writing styles which are to be taught in 9th grade English classes.

I think this book would be especially helpful to reluctant readers for a few reasons. This book was at the 7th grade reading level according to the Fry Readability chart, though I think it should be lower. I would assume this is at the 5th grade level had I not completed the assessment, due to its content, text organization and language. It also has cartoons throughout to emphasize ideas and themes. Being that it is not too advanced, it would be comfortable for a struggling reader to use. Because the content itself is so engaging and meaningful to the 9th grade age group, I think it will be a pleasure to read and a nice stray away from the classics within the textbook. I actually read this book cover to cover when I was in the 8th or 9th grade, and it was one of my favorite reads. At that time I did not enjoy reading, but because I was so interested in what other teens were experiencing, I could not put it down.

*Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* could be used in and out of the classroom. I could simply give the book to students as something extra to read at home, and have them complete journals of reflective essays for extra credit. For advanced students, I could have them pick out the themes they feel are most important within the book and create their own writing pieces based on those themes (Reflection stage of PAR). I could read short narratives and poems aloud in the classroom before beginning our work with the core textbook, activating their schema and preparing them for the day's lesson (Preparation). This book could also be implemented in class
discussions, writing workshops, and as a model for students to use when creating their own nonfiction (Assistance stage of PAR).

Stolen Voices: Young People’s War Diaries, From World War I to Iraq:

This book is a compilation of diaries from young people across the world who have had their lives touched by the effects of war. It was edited by Zlata Filipovic, a writer who’s diary on her experiences during wartime in Sarajevo was compared to the The Diary of Anne Frank. I chose this book because I thought it would be a nice transition from the slave narratives that are commonly read in 9th grade English classes. Also, since the diaries span from World War I era to the present wartime, it would give students a more contemporary view on human struggling. Also the language within the compilation is a language of descriptive storytelling, which will be helpful to students when writing their own nonfiction.

I think this book would engage reluctant learners because it is a contemporary view of war and its global effects on teens and families. Perhaps the reluctant learner is not very engaged in Abraham Lincoln’s autobiography, for example, but is more interested in current affairs with which they come in contact with daily. Disinterested learners could read the short excerpts from the diaries of these teenagers, and relate the text to what they have previously learned from their parents, the media, or a History class. Because they can make these connections, they may become more interested in reading the text, and in using the style within it as a model for their own writing. They will be able to get beyond the dull subjects of presidents and essays, and touch upon something meaningful. Perhaps they will even be inspired to write about their own concerns about the world or hard times they have endured.

Stolen Voices can be used in and out of the classroom and at all stages of PAR. It can be used to activate the schema for what students already know about history pertaining to war, countries, and cultures. It’s contents can be compared to the slave narratives of an earlier lesson, and then later related to the teenage struggles of America in Chicken Soup. During the Preparation stage it could also be read aloud by me or by students, and then discussed based
literary themes, use of descriptive language, etc. During the Assistance stage it can be used as a tool for inspiration when they have to write their own personal stories on a certain topic, such as human conflict. For the Reflection stage of PAR it could be referenced when students compare the different styles and themes of narrative writing in class discussions and writing assignments. For example, students can be asked to think critically about the meaningfulness of diaries, about what is fact or fiction, or about how themes within personal writing are evident in literature throughout history.

The readability of this text was calculated between the 6th and 7th grade reading levels according to the Fry chart. I think these scores are accurate to the language that is used in the text, but that some students will need some additional scaffolding when it comes to the historical issues and cultural issues that are portrayed within. While it is at a comfortable reading level for struggling readers, its complex content will interest readers of all skill levels.

**Voices From Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives**

This book is a collection of narratives of not-so-famous slaves, such as Frederick Douglass or Harriet Jacobs, but rather a random group of former slaves from Antebellum South. It consists of first-person accounts of life as a slave, which were recorded in interviews after Emancipation. The language within the text is exemplary of the Southern, African-American dialect, making its otherwise simple language more challenging for readers. Not only does the text literally portray nonfiction storytelling, but also oral communication. Like the speeches that are assigned to be read in the core textbook, these interviews provide students with an alternate style of nonfiction literature.

This text could be used to engage reluctant learners by being read aloud by myself or by students in class. The strong presence of dialect will catch the attention of students in ways that Frederick Douglass’ and Harriet Jacobs’ narratives cannot. Writers and speakers used in the core textbook to teach African American history are primarily those who rose to become educated or prominent in political or social affairs, such as Sojourner Truth or Martin Luther King. This book
will shed light on the common man, the typical former slave and his experiences. In this way it will provide a bridge of learning, so that students can compare the stories in the textbook with the book I have provided, and hopefully better understand the value of each. In this way the book will not be used to replace what is taught in the core textbook, but rather to clarify and expand upon what is already being taught.

This book would definitely be used in the Preparation Stage of PAR by activating the schema of what students have already studied about slavery and African American History. For the Assistance Stage, I would have students follow along in their text while I read aloud, or simply read aloud excerpts at the beginning or end of class.

The readability for this text scored at the 8th grade reading level, though I think the dialect makes this text more challenging (perhaps the 9th or 10th grade). With assistance I think that average and advanced students would benefit from reading this book as homework or for extra credit, but I would not assign it for struggling readers. Instead I would rely on reading excerpts aloud in class and having them follow along, or by having the advanced readers group with the struggling readers and read excerpts back and forth. To encourage its use among all reading levels, I might use the Readers’ Theater technique, and organize students into groups where they can pretend they are the characters within. Reading aloud this text I think is essential in the Assistance stage, as I think dialect becomes easier to visually understand once it is spoken.

This Boy’s Life:

This text is memoir by Tobias Wolff which recalls his life as an adolescent boy. The story is mainly about his relationship with his mother and especially his abusive stepfather, and how these experiences create the writer he later becomes. This is the only novel I chose within my text set. This Boy’s Life is an important example of nonfiction because it represents an increasingly popular genre, the memoir. Wolff’s writing style also portrays the genre of creative nonfiction, a topic I will also want to teach to my students. While his novel is a memoir, and is based on factual events, it is written in a way stylistically similar to fiction. His use of descriptive
language and his personal spin on the narrative will be a good model for students when they begin writing their own pieces.

The novel can be used to engage all learners because of its engaging story line and subject matter. Most of the texts I have included within my set are literature about the human experience, about struggling, strife, survival and success. This is a story of the conflicts of an adolescent boy, and how these struggles will be shaping his life as he comes of age. Reluctant learners will once again be able to form a schema for this novel, by simply recalling hardships in their own adolescent lives. Readers will not only be able to enjoy this novel as they relate their own experiences to that of an American teenager, but they will also be able to use Wolff’s writing as a tool for their own. They will have a hands-on example of how their own personal twist and style of writing can give life to their own memoirs.

This text will not augment the core textbook, but rather replace it in some areas. While the textbook assigns short readings as examples of nonfiction, I will assign this one book and use it for multiple exercises. I can use this text primarily during the Assistance Stage of PAR, where I can use it as an example for lessons on descriptive, opinion, narrative and creative nonfiction writing. Discussion as a class and within groups will be used during the Assistance stage to discuss themes within the book such as coming of age and human struggling/suffering. Also, this book would serve as a model for students to use when writing their own personal essays or memoirs.

The readability of this text is at the 5th grade reading level according to the Fry analysis. I think that this is a pretty accurate assessment, and that the book will be understood by students of all reading levels. The themes and literary techniques within will still be complex enough to challenge students as they analyze and evaluate this nonfiction piece.

**Room to Write:**

*Room to Write* is a pocket guide of inspiration for students to use when completing writing assignments or writing for their own pleasure. It is basically a tool for writers with
writer’s block which provides famous literary quotes, writing prompts, and guided exercises. This pertains very much to my topic, especially in the writing aspect of nonfiction. When students are assigned to write about their own life’s accounts and experiences, they may come to writer’s block. As the 9th grade is a starting point for later, more extensive writing in high school and college, it will be a challenge for students to constantly come up with new ideas for writing. Rather than rely solely on worksheets and textbook writing prompts, I would have students refer to this guidebook daily for inspiration.

This book would do well to engage all learners by promoting their creative thought. *Room to Write* is not a lengthy textbook, but rather a small guide consisting of “daily” reflections and inspirations. It can literally be read in just a minute each day, and in that minute provoke higher thinking that is unique to the reader. It is not just a mere answering of questions at the end of a chapter, or writing on a concrete topic. It requires a higher level of processing and comprehension, one which is carried out by the student independently. The whole class can get involved with these writing activities, first working silently at their desks, and then sharing out loud what they were inspired to create. It promotes an learning environment where each student can learn from one another and be recognized for their own writing styles. Having students read the opinions famous writers have on writing, will encourage them to think of the task as not a chore, but a craft to be learned and a tool for communicating. The insight they can derive from reading this book will also make them more careful readers as they continue to analyze style and vocabulary in nonfiction writing.

In the classroom I would use this book during the Preparation Stage of PAR as a way of getting students to start thinking about reading and writing in general. I might write a quote from the book onto the blackboard, or read aloud from one of the pages and ask students to respond at their desks. In groups I might have students do the Jigsaw Activity, where they can discuss different ideas the book suggests about writing and teach them to one another. Just discussing the value of the written word will really get students motivated to write their own pieces of literature, and give them the right tools they need to analyze the works we discuss in class. While
it can be used for teaching multiple writing styles, such as fiction and poetry, it can also be a tool students use far into college. It really is useful for beginning and advanced writers.

The readability level of this text is at the 8th grade according to the Fry analysis. I think that this is a little steep, and that with proper assistance I can make this an accessible tool for readers across skill levels in the 9th grade. The value is not so much in how the text is saying, but more in the quality of what is said. Perhaps working through complex vocabulary with struggling readers or implementing “Think-Alouds” would work well to increase comprehension if needed. In general I feel this would be a valuable book for all students.

**A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words:**

This book is a visual and literary tool for writers when they are in search for inspiration and ideas for writing. Each page has a black and white photograph, and each page next to it describes a literary element, such as description. The text defines and clarifies different concepts within writing, and then encourages the reader to use the photo as a way for demonstrating the use of that idea. For example, if the idea is “Want vs. Need,” the reader is taught about how different books, magazines and films use this concept in their art. The photograph provides a visual of this topic, and then the reader is encouraged to generate ideas based on that photograph. Using both what is written and the image, a writer is learning how to understand how these concepts work within literature and how they can apply use it as their own writing tools. It is a source of inspiration and assistance, to be used at anytime during the writing process.

I think this book will be particularly helpful for reluctant learners by encouraging them to think independently of what is taught from a textbook. As in *Room to Write*, their creativity will be encouraged and refined, not constrained to concrete right or wrong answers. While this book does teach writers literary elements, it provides them with more stimulating, step by step exercises. Students can work at their own pace with this textbook, either referencing multiple areas within the book, or concentrating on one idea at a time. The text provides activities that can be done at home without a teacher, or within the classroom as an essay prompt. The possibilities
for use with this book can really range from student to student in ways that are unique to their learning abilities.

I would use this text in the Preparation Stage and the Assistance Stage of PAR. I might ask students to write down or share their thoughts on a concept from the book such as “emotions.” Then I would have students do the activity alone at their desks, followed by a class discussion about any new thoughts on “emotion.” This activity might then jump-start another writing activity in which I have them analyze different ways nonfiction writers describe “emotion,” or how it works into a literary theme such as “coming of age.” In the Assistance Stage I would use this tool to clarify how writers such as Tobias Wolff are implementing writing techniques. Maybe I would refer back to an area or concept within this book that is difficult for students to locate within another literary piece, or to write about themselves. I might then have them complete an exercise again before going on to the present unit or lesson.

The readability of this text is between the 8th and 9th grade reading levels according to the Fry chart. I think this is above what the reading level should be for this text, due to the qualitative features within it. The concepts, the ideas, and the activities that are taught within the book are not so complex, and in fact most activities can be conducted at even the elementary grade levels. The vocabulary within the book might be difficult to understand at times, but the use of such words will not hinder the lesson being taught. I think students of all reading levels will be able to grasp the main concepts of the book. For struggling readers I might do the “Jigsaw” activity or focus on reading aloud excerpts as we study them in class.

A Small Place:

A Small Place, by Jamaica Kincaid is a persuasive essay about the ill effects of tourism on Antigua. Jamaica Kincaid is a famous Caribbean writer, one that does not often get taught in high school English classes. She writes this essay as a protest to tourism of this small island, criticizing both American tourists and Antiguans for their ignorance. Kincaid makes a central point throughout the essay that Antigua, though it be an independent country, has been made a
slave to tourism. The country and its people are dependent on outside influences, and the result is a type of bondage Antiguans cannot free themselves of. She persuades Americans that their ideas of the paradise of Antigua is not a paradise at all, but rather a weak, corrupted society they themselves have perpetuated.

This book would be a good tool for reluctant learners and eager learners alike because it will bring a lot of debatable issues to the table. Just about everyone would be able to relate to the American tourist that Kincaid describes in the essay, who just wants to feel the sand between her toes and taste Caribbean cuisine. But as Kincaid says, this tourist is ignorant to the real state of this island. It is by reading her essay that students will gain a new, more realistic point of view of Antigua and Caribbean culture. This is a really short book, only 81 pages long, but I still think it will be an eye-opener for students. Kincaid’s language is fierce and strong, so much that the reader can hear her voice behind the words. It will be a quick-read and hopefully an essay that will be hard to put down for students.

This text will work well with what the English textbook already provides as writing samples of persuasive nonfiction. I think that if I were to keep my subject matter focused on slavery, human struggling and survival, this would be a good book to incorporate. I could literally talk about these themes and how they are experienced by people of all ages, and throughout the world. I do not think the text could take the place of the textbook because I don’t think it can stand alone as an example of persuasive writing. Kincaid’s writing reads much like a speech, and its organizational structure is rather haphazard and unique to her. If I were to have students really learn about how to organize their writing, I would refer to a more structured written work within the core text.

The readability of A Small Place is at the 8th grade reading level according to the Fry chart, though I think the qualitative features might make it a bit higher. Students may have very little background knowledge on Caribbean history, which would require a mini-lesson from me, and clarification of the events Kincaid describes. Since they would need this scaffolding, I would probably read it aloud in class and have it assigned for reading within groups. As I mentioned
before, the content of this book is not organized in any particular fashion, which will make it difficult for students to understand the work piece by piece. The essay works as a whole to convey a central idea, which means that they’re comprehension will depend how well they understood the work from start to finish. I would definitely use this book in a class of advanced readers, and have them study it independently or in groups. For struggling readers I might pull out important excerpts and have them follow along while I read aloud, or have them read aloud in class. I might break down the essay into smaller parts so that struggling students could pay attention to specifics, such as Kincaid’s persuasive language.

*A Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry:*

This text is a collection of contemporary American poems by seventy five 20th century poets. This book was used in one of my American Literature college classes and I find myself referring to it often. It is a broad collection of poetry which ranges in a variety of themes and styles. The book is useful as a tool to teach nonfiction because it contains poetry dealing with the same themes we will be discussing in class, such as war and slavery. It also provides more examples of nonfiction poetry besides what is given in the core textbook, and is a good example of descriptive and persuasive language. I could use this book to teach English classes across grade levels, and students could use it as a way to brainstorm or receive additional practice in reading poetry.

I think this text will be great for all types of learners because usually, whether they admit it or not, students like poetry. The verses in a poem can read a lot like music lyrics, and speak to each student uniquely. Students will use this book not as a way to come up with right or wrong answers to what they read, but as a way to have them thinking about themes, vocabulary, and structure. It is meant to be relaxing for student, unlike a test or a lengthy novel to be completed. I might use this book to read aloud a poem describing war, and have students respond before we begin reading *Stolen Voices.* For advanced students I might have them choose their favorite poem, and create their own piece modeling in the style of that poet. The possibilities are really
endless for using this book in the classroom, and I think it will be great for using along with the poems the core textbook uses. If students like a particular poem in the textbook, I could find one in the anthology that is similar or by the same writer. This book could be used to replace the poetry within the core text, but I would rather use it to expand upon it. I would use this text in all stages of PAR. In the Preparation Stage I could use a narrative we have already read in class to compare it to a poem. I could have students share their thoughts on poetry before referring to either the core text or this anthology, and then use a fun poem from the collection to jump-start a discussion. I might play a song with poetic lyrics as a segway into discussing the literary elements of poetry. In the Assistance stage, I would use this book as a tool for students to use when needing additional help or resources for poetry. They might not understand how poetry fits into nonfiction writing, or how to make their own poetry honest and truthful. This book will be a resource for them, and something they can still use later in high school or college. In the Reflection Stage I can simply have students think of a theme we have discussed in class, and create a poem which narrates that theme. They could be assigned to write a poem which narrates a true event with descriptive language, or persuades a reader with fact and opinion. Reading this text will be a good source for later reflection when they must demonstrate what they have learned throughout this unit.

Honestly, I did not complete a readability chart for this particular book. Many of the poems do not have sentences at all, but instead are one long verse. Others are so filled with so much obscure language and grammar that it would probably score off the charts for readability. I think the readability can only be assessed once I decide which poem I will be teaching in class, and what methods to take when teaching it to different readers. Advanced readers and struggling readers alike will still have the opportunity to read for pleasure and challenge themselves with this text, but as far as class work goes I will have carefully select which poems are suitable for the entire class.

_The Fourth Genre:_
This is another text I used in college for a creative nonfiction course. Creative nonfiction is a genre of nonfiction writing that reads like fiction. It can include autobiographies, memoirs, and narratives, but portrays them with plots, setting, and characters. For this reason it has many of the same elements of a novel or a fictitious story. Inside there are creative nonfiction stories by popular writers such as Anne Dillard, and essays by these writers of the genre which talk about the writing process. This applies very much into my topic on nonfiction reading and writing because it is exemplary of this very popular and upcoming writing style. It will be a good tool to use when I teach *This Boys Life*, because it will shed light on some of the same writing styles Tobias Wolff uses. While Wolff’s character is himself in the story, he goes through conflicts and settings much like a fiction character would.

To make this book interesting for all learners, I would probably refer to it only aloud in the classroom. I could read a personal essay one day for entertainment, or an essay the next which might prompt students in to thinking about writing techniques. The stories within the book are moving, but the literary essays discussing theories and ideas might be daunting for kids and a stray from the lesson itself. If I were to make photocopies of parts of this book, or simply read key parts in class, I could pick and choose what I want students to focus their attention on. For reluctant readers and learners these class exercises would give clarity to the type of writing style Wolff uses, and to the type of style they could use when writing their own memoirs.

I think reading this book to students will activate their schema because it is so focused on writing as an art form. The stories are real, and the sentiments writers share about writing as a craft are passionate. It will get them to start forming their own opinions about writing nonfiction and how they can implement these ideas into their own works. Perhaps they will agree with one statement within the book, and not another, simply because they feel differently about what a story “should” be. They can only form these opinions once they have read and written nonfiction themselves. Plus, writing creative nonfiction is fun. It allows students to write about the stories they already know, for they have lived through them. This text will also make a great segway into a unit on poetry.
This book will not in any way replace the core text, but instead provide additional examples of nonfiction writing. Creative nonfiction is not a genre discussed in the textbook, so this book will serve to expand the lesson even further.

The readability for this text scored an average of 9th grade reading level, must this average was un unsteady one. Some stories scored at the 6th grade, while other essays scored at the 11th grade reading level. Being that it ranges so much, I would have to be careful on which pieces to have students read or respond to. This is why I would mainly read things aloud in class. Of course if a student wanted to read this book for pleasure they could do so, but I would not assign then entire book to each student.

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Audio Companion Discs One and Two:

This is the only material I chose for my text set that is not a book to use in the classroom, but rather an audio example of nonfiction. I chose this pair of cds to use to expand upon a lesson poetry and how it pertains to nonfiction writing. As I mentioned before, poetry can read much like the lyrics to a song with which a student can relate. The material on these cds is all the music and poetry of African Americans, ranging from slave songs to the pop hits of Aretha Franklin. It includes speeches from W.E.B DuBois, a prominent writer which is taught in the core text, and poetry from Toni Morrison. It would give students an alternative to reading a long speech, and allow them to hear the words these writers wrote coming from their own mouths.

I think this material will be great for all learners and readers. Many of the songs on these cds are popular songs, ones that students will recognize even if they are unfamiliar with who composed it. If I were to supply the lyrics to the students so that they could follow along with a song or poem, it would enhance their understanding of what is written and how it is meant to be spoken. Also, studying these lyrics and hearing the speeches read aloud by the speakers, would make the material more meaningful and personal to students.
These audio cds could do well to replace the text if I myself supplied the written down versions as well. If I was just to use the cds alone, then I would do so to accompany the examples of speeches and poems within the core text. I could use these cds mainly during the Preparation and Assistance Stages of PAR, where I could have students listen to the cds for clarification on the purpose of speeches and poetry. During the Preparation Stage students could be asked to respond to how they felt listening to a speech by Booker T. Washington, or a poem by Countee Cullen. It could be a segway into a slave narrative or a speech by Martin Luther King within the textbook. During the Assistance Stage these cds would be especially helpful for struggling readers, who might understand the material better if presented auditorially. It would be a nice switch from all the reading and writing that will be assigned during this lesson on nonfiction.

Using the Fry chart, the readability level changed considerably depending on the material. Most speeches and song lyrics scored at the 6th or 7th grade reading levels, while the poetry and slave songs scored lower. I don’t think this readability assessment can be taken too seriously, for it greatly depends on the content within each piece. Though the language might be simple, the concept might be difficult for any reader due to a need for prior knowledge on African American history. The simplicity of language also becomes more complex when presented visually than it does auditorially if it contains dialect, which most of these pieces do. When I read the lyrics to slave songs in my college class, I had to hear them spoken aloud to understand the meanings. For this reason I would give these cds an overall assessment of grade level 8 or higher.


