

# **“I Even Encountered Myself”: Exploring Identity Development in Literature During the Middle School Years<sup>i</sup>**

*Erin Bloom*  
*Wagner Middle School*

**Overview**  
**Background**  
**Rationale**  
**Objectives**  
**Strategies**  
**Classroom Activities**  
**Annotated Bibliography / Resources**  
**Appendices / Standards**

I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am also, much more than that. So are we all.  
(James Baldwin)

## **Overview**

From its inception, the concept of middle school in the United States has carried with it connotations of emotional and personal crisis. In the early 1960s, the first middle schools began to emerge, as means of offering limited educational instruction and a de-emphasis on academic skills, and instead, instructing pupils on social interaction and other less rigorous, non-academic subject matter (Yecke, 6). Proponents of the Middle School Movement believed that “not every child has to read, figure, write and spell,” and designated middle schools as academic holding cells—the educational equivalent comparative to purgatory (Yecke, 7). At the point of transition from elementary school to middle school, adolescents transform physically, and with these physical manifestations of their impending adulthood, come also society’s transforming expectations of their behavior, as well as shifts in cognitive development and reasoning abilities (Wallis, 40). In addition, the issues of social pressures, self-consciousness and the anxiety of the future weigh heavily upon adolescent minds. While it is certainly necessary to address the developmental needs of middle school age students, it is also necessary to do so in a means that does not impede or stifle academic growth and scholarship.

During the adolescent years, the exploration of racial, ethnic, and gender identity also

increases. The implications of this are far-reaching, especially as they manifest within the context of the cultural distortions of differences endemic in United States popular culture. While there are a number of children who have the cultural and historical literacy necessary to circumvent the stereotypes that come hand-in-hand with current popular culture, there are still many who lack the background necessary to evade the effects of their alleged societal roles. Unfortunately, in the United States, the purported racial stereotypes of minority students, especially of Latino and African American males, have been proven to negatively impact academic success. Similarly, gender stereotypes in regards to academic performance in different subjects have also been proven to negatively or positively impact those students to which the stereotypes refer (Evans, et al., 264). At this crucial point in identity development, adolescents are barraged with social pressures and issues of stereotyping that in turn affect their self-perception.

In order to combat this phenomenon, educators must create a pedagogical environment in which students are presented with academic texts that tackle these difficult issues in a meaningful way. Literature serves as a necessary means for students to understand their evolving selves as well as the ever-shifting world around them. Through the exploration of relevant texts, students develop a broader sense of themselves and their personal relationship with literature. In this way, reading is seen more as an “extension of self” or a “lens on the self,” rather than merely a passive act from which students are distanced or disengaged (Kirkland, 206). Texts such as Toni Cade Bambara’s, “Raymond’s Run” and Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use” provide both the relevant setting and context for students to engage in explorations of social and cultural acceptance and identity. The respective plots of these stories provide a portrait of an adolescent who, in caring for her older special needs brother, learns much about herself, her relationship with other young women, and how to navigate the shifting world around her; and a mother who, upon reflecting on the character and personality differences in her grown daughters, reveals that our present selves are variously and intrinsically linked to our pasts.

“I Even Encountered Myself” provides educators with a means of integrating significant literature in the middle school classroom in order to foster student exploration of relevant themes of race, gender, and ethnicity at a period in their development where examination of such is crucial. Through the critical analysis of both classical and contemporary literature, students will discover the link between past and present and the impact of our ancestral roots on our perception of self. In exploring the intricacies of these themes, students will interact meaningfully with the texts and will be prompted to respond to these externalities as a means of identity formation, both personally and collectively, through the completion of reflective writing activities and creation of a group identity quilt—all the while maintaining rigor and high academic achievement.

## **Background**

I intend to teach this unit in all three of my sixth grade Literacy classes at Wagner Middle School. My students are divided into three sections—each section is inclusive and is comprised of Special Education students, Emotional Support students, Gifted Education students, and Regular Education students. The school itself is a comprehensive, neighborhood school in the West Oak Lane section of Northwest Philadelphia. Our school has seven QZAB labs (classrooms with seventeen laptops, a Promethean board and an LCD projector), and I am lucky to be in a classroom with one of them.

Nearly one hundred percent of the population comes from the immediate vicinity of the school, which is located at 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Cheltenham Avenue. The student body is comprised of approximately 600 students whose ethnic makeup is 97.1% African American and >3% Latino or Asian. Over 76% of students qualify for Free Lunch and 36% receive Special Education services.

This unit was written to accommodate all classrooms, regardless of access to technology or demographic variations. All of the lessons in *“I Even Encountered Myself”* can be modified to meet the needs of educators in various circumstances, as long as a copier and reasonable access to the novels are attainable.

## **Rationale**

During the middle school years, students often squirm in their own skin. Yet, while they are experiencing all that accompanies their formative years, these adolescents often feel misrepresented, underrepresented, or unimportant. Throughout this period of self-growth and discovery, literature becomes an ever-present force for identity development and understanding—both personally and collectively. In reading about others who are exploring or have explored issues of race, gender and ethnic identity, students feel empowered and significant. In focusing on personal and reflective writings, even reluctant readers and writers are able to make the connection between the ideas that are most important to them and the ideas presented in their class readings.

The creation of writing programs and educators that encourage students to write is a tough order. Without motivational educators helping young writers blossom, the world of literature would stagnate. In fact, in shutting students out from meaningful writing, we designate literature as the province of privilege. In this way, literature becomes a luxury good: a commodity of entitlement that only the wealthy can be thought capable of producing and worthy of consuming. Our students need to see that they are in fact poets and writers and that their work is of great magnitude in today’s world. As this unit relates, when young people write, they reveal pieces of themselves that they may not have previously recognized. They develop as individuals, as scholars, and as citizens in a

world in which it is easy for adolescents to become “lost in the shuffle.” Through the use of exploratory reading and related writing, students are able to develop their identities and connect them in the broader context of the world—in other words, through the reading of literature, students may “even encounter [themselves].”

As mentioned above, there is a vast array of texts useful in exploring identity development for adolescents, a few of those examined in this unit include:

*The Skin I'm In*, by Sharon G. Flake

This urban youth fiction novel is about a seventh grader named Maleeka who is teased and ridiculed in her predominantly African American school for her dark-colored skin. The novel delves into themes of self-acceptance, confidence, tolerance, and friendship—themes that present themselves quite well with urban middle school students.

*Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*, by Phillip M. Hoose

In this award-winning biography, Hoose introduces readers to Claudette Colvin, a fifteen year-old African American girl, who in 1955 refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white woman in Montgomery, Alabama. Alternating between historical background information and lengthy passages from the words of Colvin herself, Hoose shines light on a teen that stood up for her rights at a very tumultuous point in our nation's history. While most students will have the popular background knowledge about Rosa Parks, this biography provides them with an example of an adolescent who took a stand, even before Parks made the history-making act as well.

“Raymond's Run,” by Toni Cade Bambara

In this much-anthologized short fiction story, the protagonist, Squeaky, an African American young woman on the verge of adolescence, cares for her older, special needs brother, Raymond. While looking after Raymond and training as a runner, Squeaky learns a lot about herself and the world in which she lives. Many readers will also make the connection with the story's commentary on the obstacles that lead young woman to view one another as competitors rather than collaborators in today's society.

“Everyday Use,” by Alice Walker

Another often anthologized short fiction piece, “Everyday Use” is told in first-person through the eyes of Mama as she reflects on the differences between her two daughters, Maggie and Dee Wangero. The story illustrates the fluidity of identity, the interpretation of ancestral roots, and the ways with which identity is shaped throughout our lives. It also distinguishes between the concept folk art as function and

folk art as object, which relates to the completion of the students' completion of the final project for this unit.

“Through the Tunnel,” by Doris Lessing

In this coming-of-age short fiction story, a young boy goes on holiday with his mother and takes a special interest in the musings of his local peers who dive off of a cliff into the ocean and swim through a seemingly endless underwater tunnel. As he trains himself each day to endure the swim through the tunnel, the boy learns a lot about his identity and the convergence of adolescence and adulthood.

“Quilts,” by Nikki Giovanni

In this poem, Giovanni uses an extended metaphor to compare life's obstacles and intricacies to the details of old, tattered quilt. In this unit, the poem is used to spawn a discussion on the identity of students from the past and present, as well as on a projection of how they would like to be perceived in the future, and how all of these identities are interrelated.

Overall, “*I Even Encountered Myself*” will be differentiated to address multiple learning levels and learning styles. It will align with district, state, and national education standards (See Appendix A). Through this curriculum unit, students will use a variety of modalities to read, write, respond to, and create works related to identity development.

## Objectives

This unit is intended for use with students in an inclusive sixth grade Literacy classroom in a middle school setting. They spend 75-90 minutes daily in Literacy class, with one day per week reserved for Writing. The over-arching goal of this unit is to foster students' passion for reading, build their appreciation of both the written word and its graphic counterparts, and increase comprehension skills.

As aligned with the Pennsylvania State Standards for Reading, Writing and Speaking, and with the Sixth Grade Literacy Curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia, the unit will address the following objectives:

- Interpret figurative language and traditional literary elements including plot, characterization, and theme
- Improve reading comprehension skills, with a specific focus on summarization and main idea

- Analyze visual techniques and forms, with a specific focus on examining the relationship between the written word and visual representation
- Create an original multimedia text inspired by writers, written and other artistic works included in the unit
- Gain a greater appreciation for literacy and the written and visual word

Beyond the technical level and development of foundational standards, students will also be encouraged to continue to read and to utilize the growing list of related texts as a means of exploring oneself. They will use invention and the creative process to create their own texts and to adapt works from notable authors into their own original, inspired pieces.

### **Strategies**

Throughout the unit, a variety of strategies will be employed to ensure that students are analyzing, internalizing, and fully comprehending the material presented in each lesson. The strategies are used to support all types of learners in the development of their reading, writing, thinking, and listening skills as they relate in Literacy and across the curriculum.

*Before, During and After (BDA):* BDA strategies will be incorporated in each lesson. The BDA strategy is a variation of the “I Do, We Do, You Do” model of classroom instruction. The strategy allows readers to interact with the text on a level that would not be reached if the teacher merely provided students with answers and explanations of the text. In the “Before” segment of the lesson, the instructor briefly introduces new materials and models how to perform activities. In the “During” segment of the lesson, students interact with the text by creating marginalia and asking questions of the text. In the “After” segment, students respond to the text in a variety of ways including analysis of the text in both written response or through the completion of comprehension questions.

*Do Now:* The “Do Now” functions tri-fold in my classroom. It occurs as part of the “Before” segment of the lesson. The “Do Now” is used to grab the students’ attention at the beginning of class, access prior knowledge about the topic at hand, and prepare them to consider the day’s objectives and material. Each day, the “Do Now” occurs as soon as students enter the classroom. Each “Do Now” lasts five minutes and is awarded five points for completion and participation. Because it happens as soon as students enter the classroom and is immediately awarded points, it holds students accountable for their class work and participation from the onset of the class period. The “Do Now” will be used throughout the unit in all three ways described above.

*Text Rendering:* Text rendering occurs during the “During” portion of the lesson. To complete text-rendering tasks, students underline, highlight and create marginalia for a given text. Text rendering is particularly useful for teaching students to interact with a text and to practice meta-cognition. In my class, student highlight key phrases and ideas, underline new vocabulary terms, and circle items that they have questions about. Text rendering is a skill that must be modeled by the educator in order for students to practice it effectively.

*Choice Boards:* Choice Boards are a differentiation tool that give students options as to which activities they would like to complete during a given class duration. The boards are set up to include skill sets that the students have learned and are currently being assessed in. Each board is set up like a Tic-Tac-Toe board from which students complete three tasks. These three tasks should encompass a variety of learning modalities and skill sets. Each set of three tasks selected by an individual student must complete a Tic-Tac-Toe row. (See Appendix B)

*Tiered Activity Lists:* Tiered activity lists are also useful tools for differentiated instruction. In brief, tiered activity lists are lists of lesson activities that are tiered in terms of difficulty level for students who are performing at different achievement levels. They are designed to allow more advanced students to go further in-depth with a concept, as well as to ensure that lower level learners are able to be assessed on the concepts as well without lowering the standard of a performance product.

*Mentor Texts:* Mentor texts are texts that can be used by educators to model a certain structure or idea. These texts are valuable in aiding students in developing higher-level sentence structures or in using the writing process to create original pieces. Mentor texts can also be used by an educator to create templates for student use for various writing assignments.

*Templates:* I create templates for use in my classroom to aid students in developing structure in their writing or to emulate a particularly effective or creative text. Templates can be used to create a “writing experiment” such as the example shown in Appendix C. They are an invaluable differentiation tool for Writer’s Workshop and can be adapted based on an individual student’s skill level. Oftentimes, I begin a writing piece with students using a template and then gradually as we move through the writing process, I take sections of the template away and ask students to revise to use their own forms inspired by the mentor text. (See Appendix C)

## **Classroom Activities / Sample Lesson Plans**

Sample Lesson: “The Skin I’m In”: The Creation of Identity Poems Based on the Novel, *The Skin I’m In*

*Description:* This three-day lesson serves as an introductory activity for the novel *The Skin I'm In*, by Sharon G. Flake. It involves demonstrated mastery of figurative language (specifically simile, metaphor, personification and alliteration), the creation of an original 15-20 line poem based on each student's perception of him or her self and the fashioning of a self-portrait that reflects the student's written piece. Students will examine the use of figurative language in the novel as it relates to the main character, Maleeka, and her physical appearance, thoughts, and emotions. They will then apply their knowledge of figurative language to create a poem about their perceptions of themselves and their personal experiences. A template will be used to guide student writing and serve as a means of differentiation of the writing component of the lesson. The poem will then be edited and published using Microsoft Word or similar word processing software. Finally, students will use a mirror (or Photo Booth) to examine their own physical features and reflect on their internal musings to create a visual representation of themselves in the mode of a self-portrait that will accompany their writing piece.

For self-conscious young teens, this assignment has the potential to be intimidating. Because the assignment forces students to look at themselves—both on the surface level and on the inside—the writing that is produced is both revealing and introspective. Students write about things from their hair, skin color, and scars on the skin's surface to misunderstandings, dreams, and the emotional scars within. To accompany this assignment, students draw a self-portrait that is either literal or interpretive. In sharing this assignment, students volunteer to reveal some of the most personal aspects of themselves to an audience of their peers. Both in terms of writing and peer relationships, the results of this assignment are astounding.

*Learning Goals:* Students will read and analyze the novel, *The Skin I'm In*, by Sharon G. Flake. They will apply their knowledge of figurative language to improve reading comprehension. Students will demonstrate understanding of characterization and will apply this strategy in the creation of a self-portrait and writing piece of him or her self. Finally, students will create an original poem that demonstrates mastery of figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, and alliteration), as well as individual, personal character reflection.

*Objectives:* By the end of the three-day lesson, students will be able to:

- Interpret examples of figurative language in the novel, *The Skin I'm In*
- Interpret visual art and describe meaning through the use of figurative language
- Create an identity poem that incorporates descriptive language, character traits, and figurative language using the "The Skin I'm In" template
- Create a self-portrait (figurative or literal) using a mirror or Photo Booth, as well as, elements from the identity poem and self-reflection exercise

*Materials:*

- Class Set of *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon G. Flake
- Class Set of Laptops with Word Processing Software and Photo Booth (optional)
- "Interpreting Figurative Language" Promethean Presentations (total of three)
- Do Now Artwork/Materials (digital or printed for each student group)
- Figurative Language Graphic Organizer
- "The Skin I'm In" Poem Template
- "The Skin I'm In" Assignment Rubric and Checklist
- Construction paper
- White card stock (preferred) or copy paper
- Colored pencils, crayons, markers, drawing pencils, watercolor and tempera paint and paintbrushes
- Magazines and scissors

*Learning Plan (Three-Day Lesson):*

Day One

*Opening Activity:*

For the "Do Now," students will view Pablo Picasso's portrait, *Self Portrait Facing Death*. As they view the portrait, students will use one word to describe Picasso's emotion in this depiction. They will then explain their choice in one to two sentences. The class will discuss individual responses and analyze their differences in interpretation.

*Mini-Lesson:*

Using an interactive Promethean presentation, teacher will introduce figurative language, including simile, metaphor, personification, and alliteration. Students will create own examples of figurative language based on their interpretations of various images shown in the interactive presentation. Students will also take notes in the notes portion of their Figurative Language Graphic Organizer handout.

*Independent Activities:*

Students will read passages from *The Skin I'm In* and interpret the meaning of the examples of figurative language in the passage, as well as their broader function within the text. Students will also begin brainstorming ideas for their "The Skin I'm In" poems by writing a list of their physical and personality traits and by completing their "The Skin I'm In" poetry template and/or writing a free form rough draft of their poems. Earlier finishers will work on *The Skin I'm In* Choice Board.

Day Two

*Opening Activity:*

For the "Do Now," students will view Frida Kahlo's portrait, *Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*. As they view the portrait, students will interpret Kahlo's decision to include the animals and the thorns in her painting. They will answer the

following guiding questions: What is the meaning of the thorn necklace? Is it a symbol of something that might be happening in the artist's mind? Why do you think Kahlo chose to include the hummingbird, the monkey and the wildcat in her self-portrait? What does this tell us about her personality?

*Mini-Lesson:*

Using an interactive Promethean presentation, teacher will review figurative language including simile, metaphor, personification, and alliteration. Teacher will model how to interpret the use of figurative using the mentor text, "Taking Action" by James Berry. In this poem, Berry uses figurative language to compare himself to animals, so students will make the connection between Kahlo's portrait, Berry's poem, and the manner with which they are able to compare themselves to images in nature in their own poems.

*Independent Activities:*

Students will edit and proofread their "The Skin I'm In" poems using the rubric and checklist. They will then get into their peer editing groups to peer edit their poems for publishing using the peer-editing checklist. If time permits, students will also publish their poems at this time using Microsoft Word or another word processing program. (If time does not permit, students will publish their poems for homework). Early finishers will work on *The Skin I'm In* Choice Board.

Day Three

*Opening Activity:*

For the "Do Now," students will view Jacob Lawrence's self-portrait, *Self-Portrait, 1977*. As they view, students will interpret the portrait and Lawrence's decision to include the background subject matter in the piece. Students will then compare the three portraits from the past three days and answer a series of guiding questions to help them in the creation of their own self-portraits.

*Mini-Lesson:*

Using an interactive Promethean presentation, teacher will briefly model how to draw a self-portrait by breaking down how to draw a face shape and facial features. Students will practice on the handout provided. (A template will be provided as differentiation for reluctant artists, but original portraits will be strongly encouraged.)

*Independent Activities:*

Using their published poems and a hand mirror or Photo Booth software, students will create a self-portrait. Art supplies will be provided and students will be able to choose the medium for their artwork (collage, paint, colored pencils, markers, crayons). Example self-portraits from several art genres will be displayed on the LCD projector for students from which students can draw further inspiration for their pieces. Final projects (poem and artwork) will be displayed side-by-side gallery style in the classroom and

hallway, as well as on the classroom blog. Early finishers will work on *The Skin I'm In* Choice Board.

### Sample Lesson #2: Piecing Together Past and Present: Crafting a Group Identity Quilt

*Description:* This three-day lesson serves as a culminating activity for the unit, "I Even Encountered Myself." It involves demonstrated mastery of skills related to characterization and the use of metaphor in poetry, the completion of a character study and comparison of fictional characters from "Everyday Use," the writing of an original narrative poem related to student identity, and a group collaboration of visual art and poetry in the creation of a class quilt. Students will read the short story, "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker and the poem, "Quilts" by Nikki Giovanni, they will demonstrate comprehension of both poetry and prose, and they will apply their knowledge of characterization and metaphor in the creation of an original narrative poem that will be used as a quilt square for the class quilt.

*Learning Goals:* Students will read and analyze the short story, "Everyday Use" and the poem, "Quilts." They will apply their knowledge of characterization to complete a character study and comparison of the sisters, Dee and Maggie, from "Everyday Use." They demonstrate comprehension of extended metaphors and their function in poetry using the poem, "Quilts." Finally, students will apply their knowledge of characterization and metaphor to complete an identity related narrative poem that will be transferred to a quilting square and sewn into the class quilt.

*Objectives:* By the end of the three-day lesson, students will be able to:

- Read and analyze poetry ("Quilts) and short fiction ("Everyday Use")
- Demonstrate understanding of characterization and the comparison of characters
- Interpret examples of metaphor in poetry
- Create a narrative poem using a metaphor
- Design and implement the completion of a class quilt using student-created poems and visual art

*Materials:*

- Class Set of Copies of "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker
- Class Set of Copies of "Quilts" by Nikki Giovanni
- Class Set of Laptops with Word Processing Software (optional)
- "Characterization," "Extended Metaphor," and "History of Quilting" Promethean Presentations (total of three presentations)
- Do Now Artwork/Materials (digital or printed for each student group)
- Characterization and Character Comparison Graphic Organizers
- "Pieces of Me" Narrative Poetry Assignment Rubric and Checklist

- Colored pencils, crayons, markers, drawing pencils, watercolor and tempera paint and paintbrushes
- Scissors, thread, sewing needles
- Quilting Squares and Transfer Paper
- Iron

*Learning Plan (Three-Day Lesson):*

Day One

*Opening Activity:*

For the “Do Now,” students will complete a quick write using a list of character traits generated by the teacher. They will choose three character traits to describe themselves and describe how each trait represents an integral aspect of his/her personality. Students will discuss answers in a quick “whip around” activity.

*Mini-Lesson:*

Using an interactive Promethean presentation, teacher will review concept of characterization. Using a short passage, teacher will model how to use the actions, dialogue, thoughts, emotions, and physical attributes of a character to complete a character study. Students will then read another short passage together as teacher guides students through the completion of a group character study.

*Independent Activities:*

Students will read the short story, “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker. They will use the Characterization graphic organizer to complete a character study of Mama, Dee, and Maggie. They will then use the information gathered to compare the sisters, Dee and Maggie. Finally, students will brainstorm ideas for their narrative poems in their journals. Past student and teacher generated examples will be provided as mentor texts for the assignment.

Day Two

*Opening Activity:*

For the “Do Now,” students will view the animated short film, “The Mantis Parable.” As they watch, students will be asked to write a metaphor for how this film represents an aspect of human life. Students will then explain their metaphors and share their responses with their writing partners.

*Mini-Lesson:*

Using an interactive Promethean presentation, teacher will review the concept of metaphor (or introduce if metaphor is a new topic for students). The presentation will be differentiated for a variety of modalities, using both visual and auditory cues for

metaphor. Lastly, teacher will model how to interpret a metaphor using the text, “Dreams” by Langston Hughes.

*Independent Activities:*

Students will read the poem, “Quilts” by Nikki Giovanni. As they read, students will answer a series of guided questions to interpret the use of metaphor in the poem. Then, students will write a narrative poem using an extended metaphor that is representative of their lives or an aspect of their lives. For this portion of the lesson, students will use their brainstormed notes from their writing journals.

Day Three

*Opening Activity:*

For the “Do Now,” students will view images of several African American quilts. They will reflect on the stories that are presented in the quilts and how the images in the squares may be symbolic for other aspects of African American history and culture. Students will then share their responses in a class discussion.

*Mini-Lesson:*

Using an interactive Promethean presentation, teacher will provide an overview of the history of quilting in African American culture. The presentation will include images of quilts as well as their corresponding stories. Teacher will then show his/her model of an art piece inspired by the poem written from the previous day’s lesson.

*Independent Activities:*

Students will create an art piece inspired by the metaphors from their poems. This art piece will be transferred to cloth (by the teacher) using an iron and transfer paper. Students will then pass the pieces of fabric and sew their class quilt using the quilt pattern as they share their poems aloud with the class. The finished product will be a class quilt that is representative of individual student identities as well as the collective identity of the class.

## **Bibliography / Resources**

### *Unit Bibliography*

Evans, Ashley B., Kristine E. Copping, Stephanie J. Rowley, and Beth Kurtz-Costes. "Academic Self-concept in Black Adolescents: Do Race and Gender Stereotypes Matter?" *Self and Identity*: Vol. 10, p. 263-277.

French, Sabine Elizabeth, Edward Seidman, LaRue Allen, and J. Lawrence Aber. "The Development of Ethnic Identity During Adolescence." *Developmental Psychology*: Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 1-10.

Gorvine, Benjamin, Eli Karam, and Marina Eovaldi. "Strengthening Individual Identity in the Group Context." *Middle School Journal*: Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 13-20.

Kirkland, David E. "Books Like Clothes: Engaging Young Black Men With Reading." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*: Vol. 55, No. 3, p.199-208.

Luther, Kristen. "Celebration and Separation: A Troublesome Approach to Multicultural Education." *Multicultural Perspectives*: Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 211-216.

Yecke, Cheri Pierson. *Mayhem in the Middle: How Middle Schools Have Failed America and How to Make Them Work*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2005.

### *Filmography*

*The Mantis Parable*. Dir. Josh Staub. Perf. Animation. Jubilee Studios, 2005. Film.

### *Teacher Resources*

Galbraith, Michael and Robert Vogel. *Voices of Teens: Writers Matter*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association, 2008.

"Strong Women and Gentle Men." *Teaching Tolerance*.  
<<http://www.tolerance.org/activity/strong-women-gentle-men>>.

### *Student Resources*

Bambara, Toni Cade. "Raymond's Run." Minnesota: Creative Education, 1990.

Flake, Sharon G. *The Skin I'm In*. New York: Jump at the Sun, 2007.

Giovanni, Nikki. "Quilts." *Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More*. Web. 1 June 2012.  
<<http://www.poets.org>>.

Hoose, Phillip M. *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009.

Hughes, Langston, Arnold Rampersad, Dolan Hubbard, and Leslie Catherine Sanders. *The collected works of Langston Hughes*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001. Print.

Lessing, Doris. "Through the Tunnel." Minnesota: Creative Education, 1997.

Walker, Alice, and Barbara Christian. *Everyday use*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print.

## **Appendices / Standards**

### *Appendix A – Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking*

These standards are taken from the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s State Standards.

**R8.A.1.1:** Identify and apply the meaning of vocabulary.

**R8.A.1.3:** Make inferences, draw conclusions, and make generalizations based on text.

**R8.A.1.4:** Identify and explain main ideas and relevant details.

**R8.A.1.6:** Identify, describe, and analyze genre of text.

**R8.A.1.5:** Summarize a fictional text as a whole.

**R8.A.2:** Understand nonfiction appropriate to grade level.

**R8.A.2.5:** Summarize a nonfictional text as a whole.

**R6.B.3.3.1:** Identify, explain, and/or interpret text organization, including sequence, question/answer, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, or problem/solution.

**R6.B.3.3.3:** Interpret graphics and charts and/or make connections between text and content of graphics and charts.

**R6.B.1.1.1:** Identify, explain, interpret, compare, describe, and/or analyze components of fiction and literary nonfiction.

**R6.B.2.1:** Identify, interpret, and describe figurative language in fiction and nonfiction.

**1.4.6.A:** Write poems, short stories, and plays.

**1.4.6.B:** Write multi-paragraph informational pieces (e.g., letters, descriptions, reports, instructions, essays, articles, interviews); Use relevant graphics (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs).

Appendix B – Sample Choice Board for *The Skin I'm In*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***The Skin I'm In Choice Board***

*Instructions:* Choose three activities from the board below. Your choices must make a straight line and include one activity focused on each of the three topics (character analysis, plot, and figurative language). Each box is worth 10 points for a total of 30 points for the assignment. You will have one week to complete all three boxes during Independent Practice. Good luck!



<p><b>Character Analysis</b> Create a Character Web in Inspiration 8 for one of the characters in the novel (Maleeka, Charlese, John-John)</p>	<p><b>Plot</b> Choose a major scene from the novel. Depict its events in a comic created on Comic Life (at least 6 boxes with captions and dialogue).</p>	<p><b>Figurative Language</b> Write a poem about bullying. Include at least one example of simile, metaphor, alliteration, and personification.</p>
<p><b>Plot</b> Create a book cover with a synopsis of the novel. Include only the major points of the plot in your novel, and be sure not to reveal the ending.</p>	<p><b>Figurative Language</b> Write a simile or metaphor to describe one of the events or characters in the novel. Use ArtPad to create a graphic representation of your simile/metaphor.</p>	<p><b>Character Analysis</b> Create a Facebook page or Twitter account for Maleeka, Charlese, John-John, or Caleb. Use evidence from the text to create their profiles, tweets/posts from other characters, etc.</p>
<p><b>Figurative Language</b> Write a blog post to review the text. Use figurative language in your review (you must have at least 3 examples).</p>	<p><b>Character Analysis</b> Write a diary entry about one of the major events of the novel from the perspective of Char. Use evidence from the text to support Char's opinion of the situation.</p>	<p><b>Plot</b> Use the Plot Analysis template on Inspiration 8 to analyze the plot of the novel. Be sure to choose symbols that relate to each event.</p>

Appendix C – “The Skin I’m In” Poem Template

## “The Skin I’m In”: Identity in Poetry

**Instructions:** Use this handout to write the rough draft of your poem on a separate sheet of paper. **BE SURE TO WRITE WHOLE PHRASES NOT JUST WORDS!** Then, type your poem in MS Word and add a photograph or image to represent the “skin you’re in.”

**Line 1:** I am \_\_\_\_\_. (Your name)

**Line 2:** 4 adjectives (character traits, etc.) to describe you

**Line 3:** The skin I’m in is \_\_\_\_\_. (Adjective)

**Line 4:** The scars on the surface remind me of \_\_\_\_\_. (How did you get them?)

**Line 5:** In my \_\_\_\_\_ (color) eyes, I see \_\_\_\_\_. (What do you see in your eyes?)

**Line 6:** Like \_\_\_\_\_ (Simile to describe what you see)

**Line 7:** In my smile OR frown (circle one), I feel \_\_\_\_\_. (What does your smile or frown show about you?)

**Line 8:** Example of alliteration

**Line 9:** From my lips, I say \_\_\_\_\_. (What do you say to the world?)

**Line 10:** People outside me think I’m \_\_\_\_\_. (What do others think of you?)

**Line 11:** In my ears, I hear \_\_\_\_\_. (What do you hear in the outside world or at home).

**Line 12:** Inside my skin, I feel \_\_\_\_\_. (How do you feel inside?)

**Line 13:** My skin does not always show the real me.

**Line 14:** The real me is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (What are you really like inside)

**Line 15:** Someday, I will LOVE /OR HATE the skin I’m in. (Choose one and circle it)

---

<sup>i</sup> Full text of quote by James Baldwin: "I met a lot of people in Europe. I even encountered myself."