

Snapshot Autobiography

Materials: Copies of Snapshot Autobiography Project

Note: This lesson is designed to span two class periods.

First Day Plan of Instruction:

1. Journal free-write: What is the story of your birth?
Note: For various reasons, including adoption, some students may not know the story of their birth. We encourage you to keep this in mind throughout the lesson and offer students an alternative life event to write about if appropriate.
2. Pair/Share.
3. Whole class discussion:
 - *How do you know the story of your birth?*
 - *What evidence do you have to back your story?*
 - *How might someone else remember this story?*
4. Pass out and explain directions for the Snapshot Autobiography. Students begin to design pamphlets.

Homework: Students finish pamphlets **and** interview someone for second perspective.
(See second page of Snapshot Autobiography Project.)

Second Day Plan of Instruction:

1. Explain that we will first begin by sharing one of our important events. It does not necessarily have to be the one that you asked another person about.
2. Students each share one event. (Given time constraints, you might need to divide class or only ask for volunteers to share an event).
3. Discussion questions:
 - Why did students choose certain events and not others? What made some events more important or memorable than others?
 - Was it difficult to select events? Why or why not?
 - What types of evidence would be necessary to corroborate that your selected event actually happened?
 - What happened when you asked someone about the event? Did they agree with your version? Did they remember things differently?
4. Closing comments: *This is what history is like. History is what happened in the past, just like the events in your life. Different accounts may conflict or agree with one another. Our work this year is to figure out how we can gather enough evidence to get the clearest picture possible of what happened in the past.*

Acknowledgments

These ideas were inspired by prior assignments by Professor Walter Parker of the University of Washington's College of Education. We gratefully acknowledge our intellectual debt to his work.

Snapshot Autobiography Project

What is history? Many people describe history as the study of the past, a huge collection of names, dates, and facts that you are expected to memorize. The goal of this assignment is for you to discover other meanings of history and to recognize why it is important to study history.

In this project, you will think about the meaning of history by describing and illustrating several events from your own life, finding a witness to provide another description of one of those events, and thinking about the similarities and differences between the two descriptions.

Part I: Snapshot Autobiography

- 1) Take blank, regular size piece of paper and fold it so that it forms 3 panels (like a letter you'd mail). Counting front and back, you should have 6 panels.
- 2) The first panel is the cover for your Snapshot Autobiography.
 - Give your autobiography a title, for example, "Snapshots from the Life of Kathy."
 - You may illustrate it if you wish.
- 3) On the back panel write a brief "About the Author" section. Include your name, place and date of birth, and anything else you want people to know about you. You may include a self-portrait if you like.
- 4) This leaves four panels. In the first of these panels, write about your birth. In the other three panels, you are going to write about important events that have shaped you as a person. This means that you are selecting a total of three important events (besides your birth) from your life.
 - You will be interviewing another person about one of these events, so make sure to pick at least one event that someone else knows about.
 - For each of these three events, write a narrative (story) describing what happened. Make sure you describe it from start to finish. Pretend that someone who doesn't know you will be reading your story and trying to understand it. Be sure to include details!
 - Illustrate each event with a small, hand-drawn picture.

Name: _____

Part II: Homework: Snapshot Biography – Another Perspective

Now is your chance to talk to somebody else who remembers one of the important events you chose.

- 1) Select **one** of the events you wrote about.
- 2) Find somebody who remembers that event. For example, a parent, grandparent, sibling, or friend who will be familiar with the event you described.
- 3) Ask the person you chose to tell you their version of the story. In order to make sure that you are getting *their* version, ask them an open question about the event, for example, *“Mom, do you remember when Jane and I started being friends in fifth grade? Can you tell me what you remember about when we met?”*
 - Take careful notes of the interview. Pay attention to which parts of their story are different from your own.
 - Make sure to thank the interviewee for their participation in this project!

Name of the person being interviewed: _____

Relation to you: _____

Event from Snapshot Autobiography they will be corroborating (cross-checking):

Interview Notes

What do the two stories have in common?

What is different about the two stories?
