

## Sixth Grade Unit Plan on “Goals and Aspirations”

Bill McCleary

While Marcia Alessi is figuring out what sort of unit she would like me to write for her class, I developed the following unit for practice. I have attempted to use the principle of studying language in context. Please give me feedback about how or what to improve for language study in the unit.

In the case of actual use of this unit, the teacher would need to adapt it for his or her school situation. How much language study was done in previous grades? What materials are available to the sixth grade? Where will this unit occur in the school years? (It’s the second unit in the Michigan curriculum.) Will all sixth grade classes use the same unit at the same time? Are other sixth grade teachers willing to help in the adaptation?

To help me in planning the unit, I obtained a copy of the teacher’s edition of Marcia’s textbook. This is the Prentice Hall *Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*, copper level (Pearson Education, publishing as Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004 edition). I haven’t referred to specific pages, but the book has useful information on context clues, word derivation, correctness, and, to some extent, grammar. It seems to me that the grammar part is rather old fashioned, but I prefer to leave the evaluation of that part to folks with more expertise than I have. I know that Marcia uses Ed Vavra’s KISS materials rather than her textbook, but I’ll wait to do her unit before using KISS materials myself.

For composition, the textbook’s assignments are based primarily on the modes of discourse whereas I use the more modern approach involving the aims of discourse for assignments. However, Chapter 8 on the comparison-and-contrast essay has some useful material for this unit’s assigned essay comparing a biography and an autobiography of the same person. You can also see in that chapter how the book attempts to integrate the study of grammar with composition. It’s truly pitiful.

Also for composition, I’m assuming that the teacher will use the process approach to teaching composition and do so using the “writing workshop” method.

### **Outline of the Unit, as given in the Abstract of the Michigan Unit Plan**

This unit is based on a Unit Plan for Goals and Aspirations from the Michigan English Language Arts curriculum for the sixth grade. It is part of “A Sample Core Curriculum for Michigan Schools.” The whole unit plan, including Benchmarks, Assessment Tasks, and Instructional Resources can be found at the following URL:  
[http://www.michigan.gov/scope/0,1607,7-155-13497\\_13498\\_13499...](http://www.michigan.gov/scope/0,1607,7-155-13497_13498_13499...)

1. Students develop several personal goals to accomplish during the unit. They revise these goals as they complete readings and review journal entries throughout the unit.
2. Students keep a response journal.

3. Students read about noteworthy people from a variety of sources.
4. Students work together to create a list of attributes and character traits of successful people and the personal experiences that may have engendered these attributes and traits.
5. Students maintain a list of unfamiliar words encountered through the readings and suggest strategies or resources they used to develop working definitions for these words.
6. Using primary and secondary sources about an individual, students compare an author's perception of the individual to the individual's perception of himself.
7. Thinking about possible career goals, students develop interview questions and then conduct an interview of a person in a profession or vocation of personal interest.
8. Using the appropriate text structure, they write a summary of the interview.
9. Students differentiate sets of standards for individual use in selecting a career and demonstrate understanding of these standards.
10. Students use at least three sources (e.g., biographies, interview summaries, personal interest) to plan, prepare, and deliver a speech on a career best suited to them.

### **Possible Ways to Study Language in This Unit**

Underlined items are the various contexts for language studies as given in what has come to be called Bill's curriculum. Following them are the language subjects to be covered in sixth grade. See "Language Study in the Language Arts Class: Major Curriculum Elements," sixth grade (Bill's curriculum).

1. Dictionary Skills: defining parts of speech by inflections; noun phrases; word formation with multiple prefixes and suffixes.
2. Language Variation: Language of in-groups, especially single words and how life experiences affect language.
3. Oral Discourse: Routines and Conventions: Classroom discourse: recitation, asking questions, working in pairs and small groups, interviewing visitors.
4. Print Media: organization, genres, and language: magazines—their organization, parts, and types (literary, general interest, specialized topics), language variation of these aspects.
5. Conventions of Writing: Punctuation of dialogue in stories: quotation marks and association punctuation; spelling of affixes and bases; reported speech: the language of dialogue and quotations, including speaker tags.
6. Linguistic Features of the Modes: Language of literary description: more on person and scene; action vs. linking verbs; selecting better nouns; language of historical narration, 3<sup>rd</sup> person; action with less drama.

7. Linguistic Features of the Rhetorical Aims: Figurative language; the varying relationship between author and reader and its manifestation in language, esp. personal pronouns; introduction to the language of formal and informal logic.

8. Linguistic Features of Basic Pragmatics: Larger coherence patterns in informative writing; evaluating one's progress in making changes in reading patterns, if needed. Illustrating oral and written reports. More on language variations as audience size varies, esp. in oral discourse.

9. The Language of Evaluation, Intolerance, and Discrimination: Beginning to look at stereotypes of people, perhaps with regional differences. How negative stereotypes are manifested in language and discrimination; feelings of those on the receiving end; evaluating and correcting perceptions.

## **The Unit Plan**

by Bill McCleary

### 1. Introduction to the unit.

A. What are goals and aspirations?

B. Introduce Focus Questions for the unit

a. How do goals and aspirations shape one's future?

b. What are your goals and aspirations?

c. What character traits are common to successful people?

C. The teacher outlines the unit, concentrating on what students will be doing and what they should be learning.

C. Students write down some personal goals to accomplish during the unit. Examples might include learning to see what one needs to do to accomplish a goal, or reading a whole book this time, come heck or high water,

### 2. Reading and studying a short biography

A. Students silently read "Mary McLeod Bethune" in *Black Stars of the Civil Rights Movement*, edited by Jim Haskins

B. Each student identifies and writes down at least two of Bethune's goals and aspirations. Then they get together in groups of three or four and compare their findings. They make up a combined list to submit for class discussion.

C. Through class discussion, students learn more about identifying the goals and aspirations of people they read about.

D. Students individually look back at the text. They write the following two questions in their response journals: What experiences did Mary McLeod Bethune have that led her to form her goals and aspirations? What character traits helped her to fulfill those goals and aspirations? Then they write responses to the questions.

E. The teacher points out the end note numbers and the end notes and explains what they are. The teacher also advises students that identifying the sources only of the direct quotations is just one method of indicating sources, and not the usual one required in school.

F. Each student identifies and writes down at least two unfamiliar words or phrases and a guess as to their meanings.

Some possibilities are the following: founder, adviser, exulted, “mentally we were still enslaved,” tuition, dormitory, Spanish moss, contractors, interracial cooperation, curriculum, appendicitis, segregated, enrollment, direct access, coalitions, Black Cabinet, New Deal, honorary degree, Last Will and Testament, live harmoniously.

G. Through class discussion, students review what they learned in the past about dealing with unfamiliar words and phrases. (This includes uses “word parts” such as inter- and -itis.) They also find certain of the words and phrases in the text and test how the full context helps to define them. (These items will be chosen by the teacher but will need to come from the actual list compiled by the students.)

H. Looking again at the chosen words and phrases in context, students try to determine what they know about the pronunciation of each item and how they know it.

I. The teacher chooses a few items for students to check out in a dictionary. If no classroom set of dictionaries is available, the teacher can photocopy appropriate pages or form small groups with one dictionary per group.

### III. Reading and studying a short autobiography

A. Students read a short (condensed) autobiography of Mary McLeod Bethune, taken from *Black Women in White American: A Documentary History* edited by Gerda Lerner. They read it silently first, and then aloud to the class. To get ready for reading aloud, each takes one paragraph, practices for a few minutes, receives coaching from the teacher when necessary, and reads aloud to another student. Then the autobiography is read aloud in order. (This procedure is helpful since the autobiography is written for adults.)

B. Students review the text silently and identify goals and aspirations of the author. In a class discussion, the teacher makes a list of students’ answers on the chalkboard. In further discussion, the list is pruned, as the teacher explains about the difficulties of interpreting a text. Finally, students compare the goals and aspirations in the biographical discourse with this autobiographical piece. The class speculates on the reasons for any differences that they find.

C. Each student reviews the text again and identifies the experiences and character traits involved in the goals and aspirations. This is followed by class discussion, in which the teacher lists experiences and character traits on the board.

D. The teacher introduces the terms *biography* and *autobiography*. Students first analyze the words and then look back at the two articles they read in order to see the differences. Specifically, they compare the following two excerpts:

*At age twenty, she began teaching at the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta, Georgia, working closely with the school's founder, Lucy Laney. The school offered courses for black students from the elementary grades through high school. Laney, a black woman, convinced Mary McLeod that one of the greatest needs of African Americans was for dedicated teachers like herself.*

*McLeod next taught in Sumter, South Carolina, where she met and married Albertus Bethune in 1897. The couple had a son, and Mary stopped teaching "so that I could be all mother for one precious year. After that I got restless again to be back at my beloved work...." Her husband died soon afterward, and in 1904 Mary McLeod Bethune moved to Daytona Beach with the dream of opening a school for black children.*

*When I graduated, I offered myself eagerly for missionary service in Africa, but the church authorities felt I was not sufficiently mature. Instead, they gave me another scholarship, and I spent two years at the Moody Bible School in Chicago. Again I offered myself for missionary service, and again I was refused. Cruelly disappointed, I got a position at Haines Institute, in Augusta, Georgia, presided over by dynamic Lucy C. Laney, a pioneer Negro educator. From her I got a new vision: my life work lay not in Africa but in my own country. And with the first money I earned I began to save in order to pay off Father's mortgage, which had hung over his head for ten years!*

*During my early teaching days I met my future husband. He too was then a teacher, but to him teaching was only a job. Following our marriage, he entered upon a business career. When our baby son was born, I gave up my work temporarily, so that I could be all mother for one precious year. After that I got restless again to be back at my beloved work, for having a child made me more than ever determined to build better lives for my people....*

E. If these questions have not already come up, the teacher explains the function of the ellipses at the end of many sentences, introduces the terms *ellipsis* and *ellipses* and explains how they work. (There are usually three dots, but the fourth is added as a period when the ellipsis falls at the end of a sentence.) Note also that they look better when there is a space between dots. The teacher also points out the place of publication of the original essay and discusses how one might be able to obtain a copy of the essay.

E. The teacher introduces the term *stereotype* and the class identifies some stereotypes in movies they have seen: tall people must be basketball players; smart students must be nerds; blonde girls must be airheads; etc. The class also discusses the validity of such characterizations.

F. Students are asked to work individually to see stereotypes in the two short pieces about Mary McLeod Bethune. The class discusses how stereotypes might have affected her ability to attain her goals and aspirations.

### III. Reading a book-length biography or autobiography

A. Students review their short –range goals to be met while studying the unit. They also begin thinking about longer-range aspirations and goals for such matters as further education, sports, careers, and personal experiences.

B. The teacher brings to class a collection of biographies and autobiographies. These are usually drawn from the classroom library, the school library, and the local branch of the public library. For a heterogeneous class, there should be at least a small range of reading levels.

C. The teacher uses a specific technique to help students choose a book. Perhaps the most appropriate method might be having students pass all the books around the class and read each book for two minutes before making a choice. Students sign the books out, using the class system or their own library cards.

D. Students are given 20 minutes to begin reading their books and are assigned to read for at least 20 more minutes at home. The teacher then reviews what the students should look for either while reading or by going back after finishing a period of reading. These are the subject's goals and aspirations, experiences that led to them, and character traits that led to successful accomplishments.

E. In the next class, students are again given 20 minutes to read silently. After 20 minutes, students write in their response journals about these two questions. What goals and aspirations did the subject of the biography or autobiography have? What experiences led to them?

F. Students finish reading the book. They again write in their response journals, this time on the following two questions: What successes did the subject of the book have? What character traits and other factors such as skills, education, and friends helped the subject succeed?

#### IV. Comparing perceptions of the book's subject

A. Students find at least one work (preferably a short one) that gives another view of the book's subject. If they read a biography, they find an autobiography, even if it's only a personal essay covering a small part of the person's life. If no suitable work can be found, students may look for a work by someone who knew the subject personally. They check the classroom library, the school library, the local library, and the Internet to find sources. They show the sources to the teacher, who must approve them as appropriate.

B. Students use the book they read, their response journals, and sources they found to make a comparison between what others thought of the subject and what the subject thought of himself or herself. They develop a side-by-side written list of similarities and differences and then begin to write the comparison in essay form, using one of the two standard comparison-and-contrast organizational patterns.

C. As preparation for the writing, the teacher gives students two or three sample papers written in previous classes. (Or the teacher may prefer to demonstrate how to write the assignment by writing, on transparencies, a comparison of the two pieces about Bethune.) As the students work on their own writing, the teacher checks with each student to see how the writing is going and to give help when necessary. If the teacher finds that many

students share a particular problem such as deciding when to begin a new paragraph, the class may be interrupted for a short lesson for everyone.

D. The teacher scans first drafts as they are finished and makes suggestions for changes on the next draft. This goes on until everyone has developed a more-or-less satisfactory draft. Then students form small groups to begin editing the latest drafts for correctness and problems of clarity or awkward expressions. Students suggest changes orally; they should not write on the drafts. Writers take suggestions that sound reasonable to them and incorporate them into final drafts.

## VI. Conducting an interview about someone's career

A. To demonstrate how to conduct an interview, the teacher arranges for an adult to visit the class and be interviewed about his or her career. Before the interview, students meet in small groups to work out a list of questions to ask the visitor. The class as a whole then develops a final list of questions, with a proviso that if a particular question opens up an interesting line of further questions, it's OK to pursue it.

B. The interview is conducted in class, with various students assigned to ask questions. The interview is recorded. The teacher uses the recording to show students how to make a transcript. Then all students write a report of the interview as if for the student newspaper, concentrating on the person's career. Students are required to include at least three quotations from the interviewee, so the teacher reviews how to do that, demonstrating how a partial quotation can be an integral part of a sentence and a whole quotation serves as a direct object. The teacher also reminds students of the usefulness of occasional ellipses. The teacher reads a few of these reports aloud and comments on them. (An alternative strategy is for the teacher to write his or her own version.)

C. Each student then, for homework, finds a person to interview about his or her career. The student adapts the questions used in class for the interview and then conducts the interview. Students are encouraged to record the interview, make a transcript, and then write from the transcript; however, this is not a requirement.

D. Before students begin writing about their interviews, the teacher has them study two or three sample papers written in previous years. Students identify important aspects of the contents, the organization, and the style. The class then makes up a rubric to use in planning their own papers and evaluating the results.

E. In class, students each write a report of their interview. When a student has a completed draft or has become stuck, the teacher scans the work and makes recommendations for changes or further development. If necessary, the teacher gives brief lessons on such matters as organization, writing direct quotations, and making the paper interesting by playing up the most unexpected information.

F. Students work on revising their papers, with the teacher helping out when necessary. The teacher continues reading drafts in class and making suggestions for revision.

G. Once the deadline for drafting comes, students meet in groups of 3 or 4 to edit the papers for correctness. Rules for editing are reviewed before the editing begins. One rule is that students should not write on each other's papers; they should identify places where they see possible errors and may even suggest corrections. However, the writers must

make their own decisions about what to correct. Students then write final drafts for submission.

H. After the editing, the same groups meet to develop a short list of things they would like to know about grammar, usage, correctness, spelling, etc. The teacher puts together a master list and show students how to look up issues in a dictionary and the grammar/composition textbook. Each member of the class takes one item to look up and to explain to the rest of the class. The teacher follows up each explanation with references to grammatical explanations, rules of spelling, rules of pronunciation, and so on, as necessary.

I. The teacher may “publish” the reports by posting them around the classroom, putting together a class publication, or putting them on the class web site.

## VII. Meeting short-range goals and setting career aspirations and ways to reach the goal

A. The class makes a list of all the careers among the interviewees and then another list of other careers that they know about. Careers of parents, relatives, and friends of the family may be included.

B. The class discusses the various ways in which the interviewees prepared for their careers.

C. Students meet in groups of 3 or 4 to discuss what makes a good career. They list their criteria, or standards, and then the teacher leads the class in making a combined list of standards and clarifying them when necessary.

D. Each student chooses three possible careers to investigate. Then the student decides on a “first choice” and uses readily available resources to investigate the choice. Sources of information can include the books that students read, the reports that they wrote, discussions with family members or other adults, and personal experiences. If students’ first choices don’t work out, they can choose another from their list of three.

E. Students prepare an oral report on the careers they investigated. They first make a list of the information they want to cover, then put it into a logical order, and then write an informal outline.

F. The class works together to develop a simple rubric for evaluating the speeches. In doing so, they remember and review rules and advice given in previous grades.

G. Students practice giving their report by giving it informally to members of their small group, and then they give it to the class. Three or four students use the rubric to evaluate a speech. This responsibility is rotated among the class.

## VIII. Evaluation of the unit

A. The teacher reviews many of the terms used in the unit: goals, aspirations, stereotypes, a few of the words from the first story, careers, character traits, transcript, quotation. Students then write several paragraphs summarizing what they did in the unit and use at least two thirds of the terms.

B. Students are given two short passages from a biography and an autobiography of the same person and are asked to point out noticeable differences in vocabulary and syntax.

C. The teacher distributes a questionnaire listing everything they did in the unit and asking students to evaluate the unit. What did they find hard to do and why? What was easy? What was most interesting? What was not very interesting? What do they think will be most useful in future schooling? What outside of school?

D. Students review their goals for the unit and write several sentences about each goal. How well did they meet the goal? What do they still need to learn?

### **Examples of books sixth graders might read for this unit**

Note: some of these were listed in the Michigan unit and some I found myself.

Ayer, Eleanor. *Ruth Bader Ginsburg: Fire and Steel on the Supreme Court*. New York: Dillon, 1995.

Bruchac, Joseph. *Jim Thorpe's Bright Path*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2004.

Fritz, Jean. *You Want Women to Vote, Lizzie Stanton?* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.  
(Note: Fritz also has a series of biographies for lower grades that might be appropriate for sixth graders who are slow readers. An example is *Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May?* New York: Coward-McCann, 1975.)

Haskins, Jim, Ed. *Black Stars of the Civil Rights Movement*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003.

Kamen, Gloria. *Hidden Music: The Life of Fanny Mendelssohn*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Kastner, Joseph. *John James Audubon*. New York: Abrams, 1992.

Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White American: A Documentary History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972. (This is the paperback version. The hardcover version was published first, also in 1972, by Pantheon Books, a division of Rand House.)