

Reading for Meaning

How Purposeful Literacy Builds Bridges
to Self, Others and the World



Fostering Connection for Life
The Path from Reading to Expression
Experience Sharing Event 2025

18 OCTOBER
EDB Kowloon Tong Education Services Centre

NET Section, CDI, EDB

Saturday, 18th October 2025

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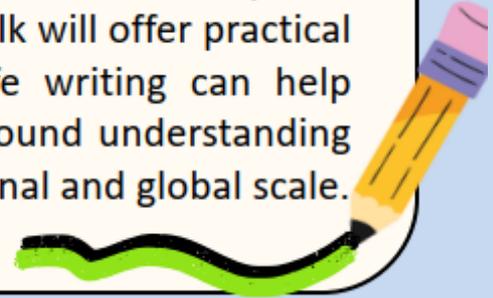


英語教育學系

ENGLISH LANGUAGE
EDUCATION

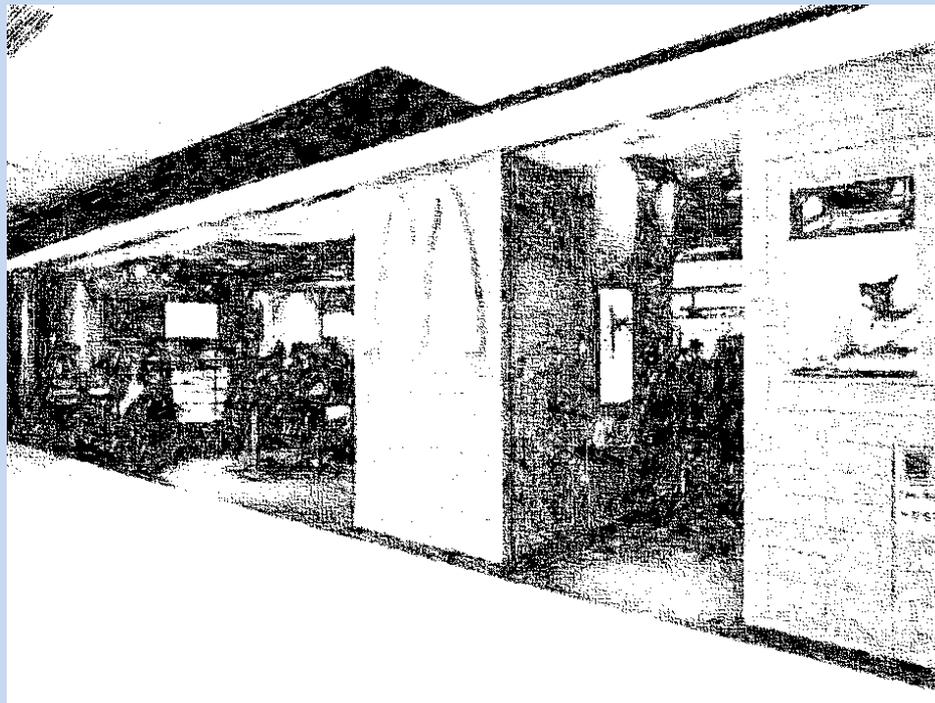
Abstract

In this session, we will discuss purposeful literacy—giving students reading and writing content that is personally meaningful. We will explore how reading memoir, autobiography, reflective essays and other narrative life writing helps students to develop a map of human values and different perspectives. At the same time, it teaches an understanding and vocabulary of how to write more reflectively and richly about their own values and experience. The talk will offer practical teaching insights as well as examples of how life writing can help students to deepen literacy and foster a more profound understanding of meaningful life values and experience - on a personal and global scale.



- **Why do students want to read less than ever?**
- **How do we teach the purpose of reading?**
- **Do we sometimes focus so much on language that we forget meaning?**

Once upon a time...



Depression, anxiety and stress among young people in Hong Kong

Major contributing factor to the mental health crisis include the pressures of schooling, too much time online; insufficient exercise; poor nutrition; and lack of social support from families and schools.



<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/2149403/one-three-young-hongkongers-suffers-stress-anxiety>



<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3304943/hong-kong-wont-set-limit-students-screen-time-despite-health-concerns>

How do we teach Happiness, Respect, Purpose and Community?



Information Services Department (2011)
Theme: Cherish Your Life



Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (2013)
Theme: Respect Diversity

Whole-Child/Whole School Education & The **SPIRE** Model of Well-Being

Ethics: Cultivating proper values and attitudes through moral and civic education.

Physique: Promoting physical development.

Intellect: Fostering intellectual development through a broad knowledge base and the ability to learn how to learn.

Social skills: Developing social-emotional skills like self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills.

Aesthetics: Nurturing appreciation for arts and culture.



The “Every-student” Curriculum



Recommended Text Types for the Hong Kong English Curriculum (P1 - S6)

Text Types for KS1 (P1 – 3)	Additional Text Types for KS2 (P4 – 6)	Additional Text Types for KS3 (S1 – 3)	Additional Text Types for KS4 (S4 – 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisements • Captions • Cards • Cartoons and comics • Charts • Conversations • Coupons • Diaries • Directions • Fables and fairy tales • Forms • Illustrations • Instructions • Labels • Leaflets • Lists • Menus • Notes and messages • Notices • Personal descriptions • Personal letters • Personal recounts • Picture dictionaries • Poems • Postcards • Posters • Product information • Rhymes • Riddles • Rules • Signs • Songs • Stories • Tables • Timetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounts • Announcements • Autobiographies • Biographies • Blogs • Brochures • Catalogues • Children’s encyclopaedias • Dictionaries • Directories • Discussions • Emails • Explanations of how and why • Formal letters • Informational reports • Jokes • Journals • Maps and legends • Myths • News reports • Pamphlets • Plays • Procedures • Questionnaires • Recipes • Telephone conversations • Tongue twisters • Weather reports • Webpages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book reviews/reports • Encyclopaedias • Film reviews • Interviews • Itineraries • Letters to the editor • Manuals • Memoranda • Newspaper/ Magazine articles • Presentations • Short films • Short novels • Social media texts • Talks • Trailers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstracts/synopses • Agendas • Debates • Documentaries • Editorials • Essays • Feature articles • Films • Minutes • Novels • Proposals • Speeches • Resumes • Thesauri

Reading and Writing for Meaning is *Reflection*



Teaching Reading for Meaning Content (modules and units from English curriculum)

Grade Levels	Text Type	Suggestions / Approaches
P1-3 (Early Primary)	Simple autobiographical stories	Stories about personal experiences, family, school life, first-person narratives
P4-6 (Upper Primary)	Memoir, recounts, diary and journal entries and personal essays	Age-appropriate memoir excerpts, personal essay models, self-written stories about growing up, family, cultural traditions
S7-9 (Junior Secondary)	Autobiographical fiction (short stories and short novels), journaling, memoir and autobiographical excerpts	More complex memoir-in-essays, autobiographical short novels, hybrid forms illustrating identity and cultural themes
S10-12 (Senior Secondary)	Contemporary autobiographical writing, autofiction, fiction and memoir	Sophisticated memoirs, experimental autobiographical essays, texts addressing migration, ethnicity, trauma, personal growth and identity

Purposeful literacy is directed towards exploring one's perspective and values in the context of a world of others:

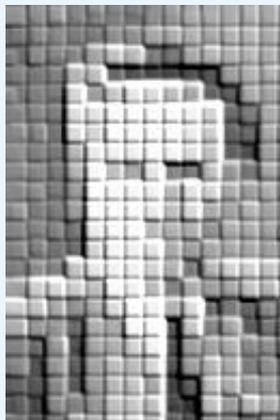
Avoidance vs. Individuation

The Self-Centered vs. The Centered Self



Asking Questions About Oneself (i.e. Ancient Questions That Don't Grow Old)

- Who Am I?
- What are my values and why?
- Does happiness matter to me?
- What governs my decision-making?
- What or who do I accept as authoritative and why?
- What experiences have shaped who I am today?
- Is choice or fate more powerful?
- What choice do I have about who I'll be tomorrow?
- Who do I want to be?



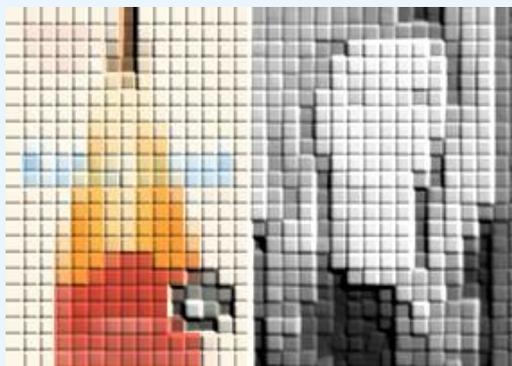
"When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves."

Viktor E. Frankl



“
Despite everything,
I believe that people
are really good at heart.”

ANNE FRANK



“My strongest memory is not a memory. It's something I imagined, then came to remember as if it had happened. The memory was formed when I was five, just before I turned six, from a story my father told in such detail that I and my brothers and sister had each conjured our own cinematic version, with gunfire and shouts.”

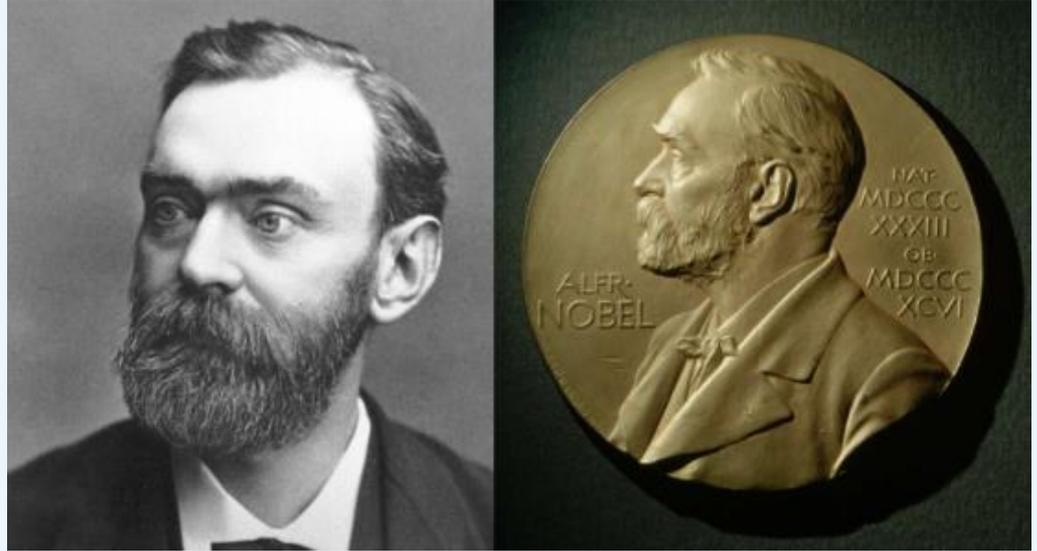
~ Tara Westover

The merchant of death is dead

"Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday."

An obituary titled *Le marchand de la mort est mort* was published erroneously in 1888 upon the death of Nobel's brother Ludvig.

The article is credited with helping Nobel decide to leave his money to establish the Nobel Peace Prize, among others.



Alfred Nobel



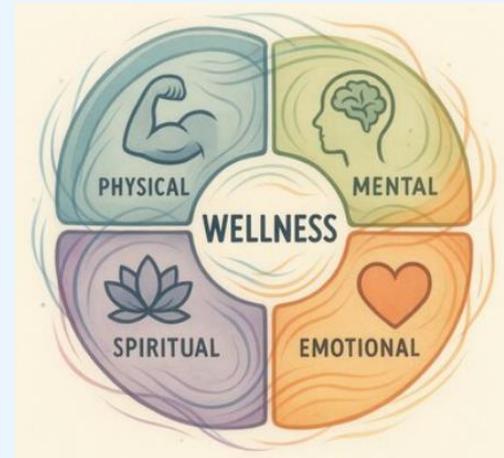
Community Service



The Environment



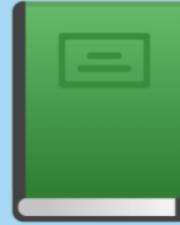
Family



Mental, Physical, Spiritual Health

Frequently Explored Themes Include:

- Turning Points
- Paradigm Shifts
- Difficult Decisions
- Crises
- Victories



DIARY ENTRIES

Live life. Pay attention. Write it down. Keeping a diary will help you develop the helpful habit of *reflection*. Sometimes it makes an interesting story.



TURNING POINTS

Two roads diverged. Life changes. You can't go home again. Everyone experiences turning points when there's no going back. It's interesting.



PARADIGM SHIFTS

I did not see that coming. Things look different now. How did that happen? Sometimes by choice, sometimes not, the world looks a little different.



DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Now what? I don't know what to do. Not to decide is still to make a choice. Difficult decisions are unavoidable. And they have consequences. That's life.



CRISES

Life is a valley of tears. Pain and suffering are part of life. Sometimes we learn from pain. Sometimes we don't. Happiness doesn't always feel real or go down deep. Pain does.



VICTORIES

We are the champions. Victories come in many sizes. Rewards will come to those who wait. What victories have you achieved through blood, sweat or tears and what lessons have you learned?

Frequently Explored Topics Include:

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Coming of Age
- Romance
- Religion
- Personal Growth
- Work
- Travel
- Pets
- Sports
- Miscellaneous



Turning Point: The Piano Lesson



“Despite living together for more than ten years, deep inside we had no idea what one another was thinking about. From then on, I have talked much more to my parents. I share all the things that happen and what I’ve experienced. Sometimes, they tell me about their work pressure. I feel we are much closer since that incident. It took a lot of money and time to learn the lesson, but it was all worth it.”

Writing Your Life techniques: Suitable for all ages!

- Opening
- Characters
- Setting
- Dialogue
- Pace
- Know your audience
- 'Showing' your story

Writing process

To write a good story you should have a writing plan.
For a good writing plan you must ask these questions:

1. Prewriting

- What is my story about?
- Who is going to read it?
- How do I begin my story?
- How do I want to write it?
- Should I make a story map for my story?

2. Writing

- Who are the characters in my story?
- Where is the story taking place?
- What is the problem?
- Who solves the problem and how?

3. Revising

- Does my story have a title?
- Does my story have a beginning, a middle and an end?
- Does my story follow an order of events?
- Do I need to add more details to my story?
- Is my story clear?

4. Editing

- Are my spellings and punctuations correct?
- Have I used correct grammar?
- Have I used complete sentences?
- Have I asked someone to read my story?

5. Submission

- Is my story typed or handwritten?
- Is my story within the word limit?
- Is my story in the prescribed font?
- Have I filled the story submission form?

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Sample Life Reading/Writing Activities

Life Reading/Writing includes a wide range of text types, including diary, journal, memoir, autobiography, reflective essays and autofiction (fictional texts written in the style of autobiographical storytelling).

Life writing focuses on both the skills of effective storytelling and the process of meaningful reflection.

Many of the learning objectives of both fiction and non-fiction can be addressed with Life Reading/Writing.

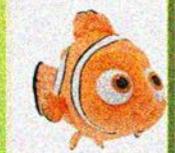


Establishing Activity - Describe Your Favourite Childhood Object



Practice a focused “showing” not “telling” writing exercise. Students describe a meaningful childhood object that was precious to them. This may become a symbol for a longer story.

Childhood Treasure - Show (Not Tell) - WYL Sem 1, 2021-22
Write a detailed description to show, not tell, about your favourite childhood object. Attach a picture that shows the object, or something like it, or the feeling or mood that the object brings you.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7
 <p>tasha</p> <p>I'm not really sure when I got my stuffed monkey but I would say around 3. I named him Michael the monkey because I really love alliteration for all of my stuffed animals but Michael was a little more special as he was a birthday gift. As you can see from the picture he has a velvety Santa Claus hat. I was born on Christmas Eve so whenever I look at him he reminds me of good times and all.</p>	 <p>Me, Myself, and my Baby Pillow</p> <p>My baby pillow and I were inseparable. My parents bought it for me even before I was born. As a kid, I always thought it was the best pillow ever. It was a small rectangular pillow, its cushion designed with a patchwork pattern in different hues of baby pink, and its case varied — sometimes it had Hello Kitty characters on it, other times it would have Mickey and</p>	 <p>Choti Chadar</p> <p>My little sister was born two weeks past my third birthday. My mother was pregnant for most of my first; first day of school, first broken bone, first existential crisis, I suppose. Despite the fact that she was there the whole time, I missed her. To me, with my little sister inside her, she was not fully herself. Not yet, not like before. And so I found comfort in representations of maternity, pre-</p>	 <p>This blue bicycle is a birthday present that I got from my parents a long time ago, and I can't even remember how old I am at that time. Although I can't recall the exact moment that I received this childhood treasure, this present is still unique and memorable for me in my life. When I was small, I used to go to the park near my home after school. Most of the children there were riding a scooter or a bicycle. How about me? I am totally different; I didn't have anything to show off! I started to compare</p>	 <p>Life size teddy bear</p> <p>This is the most bear from my childhood.</p> <p>It was a rare occasion for me to be in a toy shop unless I was well behaved as a kid. The moment I stepped foot into the toy store for the first time from my earliest memory, my eyes were glued to this specific aisle of shelves, overflowing with stuffed toys one over another. I bolted to this life size stuffed teddy bear as if somehow gave me comfort. It was brown in colour, rose scented, and</p>	 <p>Laundry Basket</p> <p>When I was small, my parents didn't really buy me many toys to play with. To ingratiate, I played with the objects that were available to me, which in this case was the laundry basket. The laundry basket had a light blue that was like the color of the sky during a sunny day. The basket</p>	 <p>Nemo Doll</p> <p>My first available toy was when I was still a kindergarten my mum and dad brought me to the cinema and watched a movie called, "Finding Nemo."</p> <p>The story was about the crown-fish (Nemo) was separated with his father (another crown fish) called Marlin and his father's friend Dory (a blue tang) accidentally. Then Nemo was drifting in the</p>

Alternative Reading/Writing Brief Introductions”

“Humans of Hong Kong”

Text, visual and video references provide students with models of alternative approaches to self-introductions, making them more interesting and engaging - because they are meaningful!

“Humans of New York” provides hundreds of examples of portrait photos with one-paragraph, 1st-person narratives of diverse people’s ideas and experiences which can be analysed for writing and content.

Students can write a one-paragraph “autobiography” based on this model and share it with classmates.

<http://www.humansofnewyork.com>



“I’m doing a review of last year. I’m looking at all the goals I set and whether I managed to achieve them. A big one for me was that I finally managed to get my driver’s license. It’s a little embarrassing because I’m well past that age, but I’ve always been terrified of driving. So I signed up for some lessons. I studied hard. I took extremely meticulous notes. Then I went to the testing center with my driving instructor. They assigned me a real hard faced guy from Eastern Europe. My instructor told me: ‘This guy fails everyone.’ So I started off pretty nervous. I messed up almost immediately and made a rolling stop. I’m pretty sure I stopped completely, but apparently it was a rolling stop. The test seemed to go on forever. I couldn’t charm the guy. I tried to make conversation but he was silent the entire time. Then after we finished, he made me sit outside his office for an eternity. But finally he came out and told me that I’d passed! It was such a relief! I haven’t driven since.”

Alternative Reading/Writing Brief Introductions” “Humans of Hong Kong”

<p>WYLTHE SPOO Introducing Bblythe</p>  <p>Hi! I am Bblythe who is a kindergarten teacher. I am a two-year program student. Don't ask me why I didn't apply to a four or five-year program. You'll find the answer next.</p> <p>To be honest, I hate studying. I don't like writing assignments, doing researches, etc. But I know study can change my life. So why did I choose to study in EDUHK?</p> <p>When I was sixteen years old, my parents didn't allow me to study anymore. They asked me to withdraw from my secondary school. At that time, everyone asked me why I didn't finish my study. I didn't know how to explain it. In the middle of that</p>	<p>WYOSPOK LEE Introducing Brodie</p>  <p>Hi, I am Brodie, a student from the Elder Academy EDUHK.</p> <p>Telling story has never been my strong point. I came from a career writing recommendation, reports, tech speeches, etc., always emphasizing on clarity and preciseness. Storytelling, to me, is like an examine trying to put as many suggestive images and description as possible into as few wordings as possible. May be a bit too much for an old man to learn this new trick.</p> <p>Not that I won't try. Just that you all may have to excuse my always over-wordy homework and certainly with my "poetic" (if there is such a word) English.</p>	<p>YAM TO CHUNG Introducing Toby</p>  <p>Hi everyone, I'm Toby, a year 4 B.A.S English Major student from Hong Kong who always strives to do my best in everything I attempt.</p> <p>While I'm mostly a positive person nowadays, I was actually very negative in the past. When I was in secondary school, I frequently compared myself to others, thinking why I wasn't as successful as them. As you know, such constant comparisons are a sure-fire way to live an unhappy life. To myself, I was never good enough and many things in my life were out of my control.</p> <p>My chronic sadness eventually caught the attention of my class teacher. One morning, when I returned to the classroom, there was a bottle of green tea with a letter next to it on my desk. In the</p>	<p>YIPSIK Introducing Patrick</p>  <p>Hi everyone! I'm Patrick and this is my new English name, actually. Since I'm an exchange student from the mainland of China, the craze of using a formal English name is few. And maybe you would be curious about that why I use a male's name, the story behind is not so long and dramatic, instead it's very simple. When I was young, my cousin said that she had a crush on a man who is the hero of a romantic novel. She thought the name "Patrick" of the man was very attractive. After hearing the description of the man, I began to think the name was awesome and it really left a deep impression on me. Although one day I found that the name was not the name</p>
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Check out
INSTAGRAM:
@wylhumans

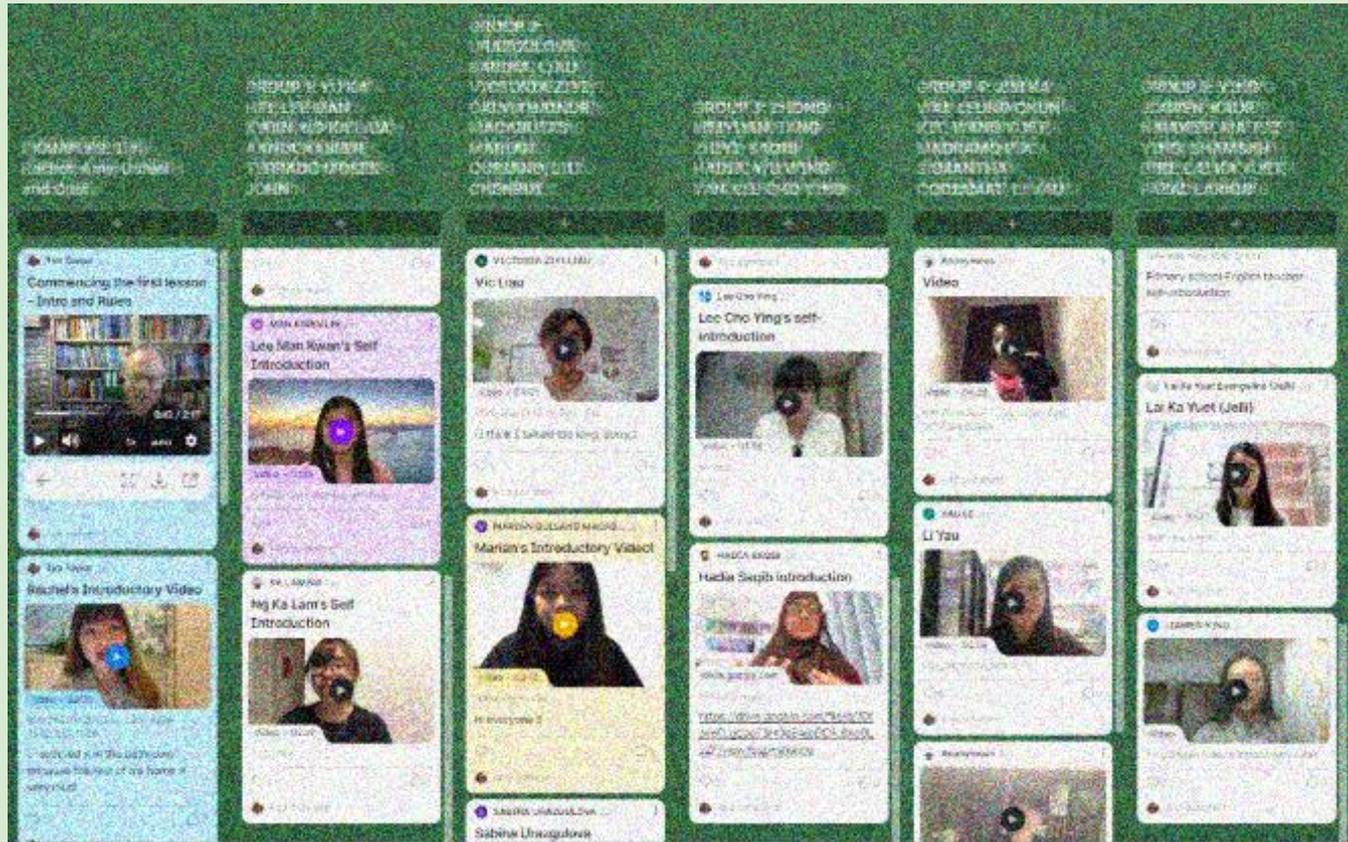
Alternative Reading/Writing Brief Autobiography: “Drawing My Life”

For **language modelling and listening input**, students can be introduced to the life stories of famous and interesting people through a variety of multimedia resources that include visual, listening and reading skills.

“**Drawing My Life**” is a genre of video-based life stories, with many examples on Youtube.



Alternative Reading/Writing Brief Autobiography: “Speaking My Life”



Reading and Writing Real and Imagined Diary Entries

- For example, students read selected diary entries from *The Diary of Anne Frank*
- Students practice writing from different perspectives and points-of-view, writing diary entries for different people *in the first-person*.
- Students write an entry in Anne's diary, in her voice but with imagined historical and personal experiences.
- Students record a diary entry from a recent memorable day. Everyone's life is interesting. Pay attention!



Consolidation Activity - Writing Your Future Self

“Writing your future self” is a detailed description or introduction of yourself in ten years in the future.

This brief “self-authoring” or “life reading/writing” activity provides an interesting “reflection” activity that invites students to look forward instead of back, “reflecting” on who they want to be in the future.

*How are they going to get there?
What are their hopes and values? Are they fixed or flexible?*



Scripto-therapy, After-Event Reviews, Structured Reflection, the Narrating Mind... and Anecdotal Evidence

A Quasi-Experimental Study of After-Event Reviews and Leadership Development

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Reading and Writing One's Way to Wellness: The History of Bibliotherapy and Scriptotherapy

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Chapter

First Online: 12 November 2017



Mentions Downloads

“Structured reflection” of one’s performance has a positive impact on leadership development, according to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*



"And finally I twist my heart round again, so that the bad is on the outside and the good is on the inside, and I keep on trying to find a way of becoming what I would so like to be, and could be, if there weren't any other people living in the world. The final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands."

~ Anne Frank



Writing Your Life Course Website (Public Version)

<https://www.writingyour.life/>



FOLLOW @WYLHUMANS ⇄

Inspired by **Humans of New York** ([#humansofny](#)) and the dazzling, colorful kaleidoscope of the human family, students of *Writing Your Life* have created their own IG account to share their stories. It's called **Writing Your Life Humans** ([#wylhumans](#)). Here students from our class introduce themselves to the world. Follow us and see more pictures at the bottom of this page.

The logo for eTEACHERS.online, featuring the text "eTEACHERS.online" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The text is centered within a white rectangular box that is overlaid on an orange rectangular background. The background image shows a close-up of a white computer keyboard and a grey mouse on a wooden desk.

Empowering Excellent English Teaching

Dr Tim Taylor

Director, eTEACHERS.online and Senior Lecturer,
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