

# StoryFACTORY

## Sunset in my Heart Teacher Resources Workshop Plan

### Workshop Description

In this workshop series students will create fragments of autobiographical writing and personal essays that use and subvert the elements of social media posts in which people present their 'best lives' to the world. Students will consider the parts of the world they know and experiences that are less well known, less obviously 'best', elements that are surprisingly beautiful, enriching, or reward the type of sustained attention that is anathema to social media.

**Text type:** Personal essays and fragments of autobiographical writing

**Students:** High School - Stage 5

### Curriculum outcomes

#### **NESA Outcomes**

#### **Stage Five**

#### **EN5-5C**

thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information and increasingly complex ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts in a range of contexts

#### **EN5-7D**

understands and evaluates the diverse ways texts can represent personal and public worlds

### Sections

- *Introduction*
- *Part One - Sunsets We've Known*
- *Part Two - Overturning Cliche*

- *Part Three* - Ideation and Development - IWeigh
- *Part Four* - Discursive Essay

## **Introduction**

### **Concepts, video, mentor text**

#### *Introduce the task and concept*

In this workshop series students will create fragments of autobiographical writing and personal essays that use and subvert the elements of social media posts in which people present their 'best lives' to the world. Students will consider the parts of the world they know and experiences that are less well known, less obviously 'best', elements that are surprisingly beautiful, enriching, or reward the type of sustained attention that is anathema to social media.

## **Part One**

### ***Warm Up - Sunsets We've Known***

#### *Activity - Discussion*

A low risk, exploratory discussion touching on the following prompts:

- Best sunsets you've ever seen
- Sunsets you've taken a photo of
- Other things that pass quickly

As students share these ideas, prompt discussion about the similarities and the differences between the student answers. Encourage students to consider the variety of experiences in the room.

#### *Activity - Idea Gathering*

Students will gather individual written responses to the discussion questions on *Worksheet #1*

#### Prompts

- Best sunsets you've ever seen
- Sunsets you've taken a photo of
- Other things that only last a few moments

#### *Additional Activity - Students Sharing Individual Ideas*

Collect these ideas from the discussion on coloured slips of paper or post it notes and stick them to a wall so students can refer to them during the workshops.

*Additional Activity - Share non-audio version of the Sunsets video*

Non Audio Video is available here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vjz6gEimDrRI3RD0boEvYmRWXxCkTo6f/view?usp=sharing>

Play the non-audio version of the Sunset in my Heart as students are working through the discussion prompts.

*Additional Discussion Prompts*

If there is time and interest, continue to build the field by encouraging students to share thoughts about the points below:

- Sunsets in Songs
- Sunset in films, TV shows, novels, art
- Random facts about sunsets
- Sunsets in history

Encourage students to be expansive, to discuss as many different ideas as possible.

The aim for this exercise is to get a sense that sunsets (as with any natural occurrence) can mean lots of different things to different people.

**Part Two**  
***Overturning Cliches - Sunset Captions***

*Activity - Writing*

Students will work in pairs or groups or three.

In this activity groups will select two lines from the captions on *Worksheet #2*.

Students will work to transform the cliched captions into new, surprising descriptions/ fragments.

Students can use any combination of words from the lines they have selected. They are also allowed to add 2 additional words.

Eg.

*Select words from the two captions below:*

Ride off into your sunset.

Cloudy days make gorgeous reds.

*Rearrange the words and they might become:*

Sunsets ride into cloudy days

OR

Make cloudy days into sunsets

*Activity - Discussion*

Students will share the new captions with the rest of the group.

Briefly discuss what the new captions bring to mind. Have the new captions made students think about sunsets in a new or unexpected way?

*Focus for students*

The intention of these workshops is to have students think about the relationship between truth and social media representation. As an introduction to this exploration students will consider the way cliches and overused phrases might be used in new ways.

## Part Three

### Ideation and Development - IWeigh

In this activity students will begin the ideation and writing process for the creation of short autobiographical pieces that examine the following points:

- Who you are?
- What is important to you? How has this changed over time?

#### Concept and Task: IWeigh

Jameela Jamil started the Iweigh movement on Instagram in 2018, when she saw a post about the Kardashians and how much they physically weigh. She counteracted this by posting all the other things she weighs, rather than her weight. The idea is that we are not just our bodies and that we weigh all sorts of different things.

#### *Activity - Ideating*

What do you weigh?

Write down words or phrases about yourself. These should be aspects of your life that you are grateful for, or proud of, or that sustain you in some way.

Students will work individually on *Worksheet #3*

#### ***IWeight - What makes you, you?***

During this activity students will complete three short autobiographical fragments which examine different aspects of their lives.

#### *Activity - Engage with Mentor Texts*

The mentor texts selected for this activity were written by students who completed the original *Sunset in my Heart* workshops. One mentor text is provided for each of the writing activities below. Allow students to read through the mentor texts to identify then discuss textual features. This can be completed by students individually or as a whole class discussion activity.

Points to draw students attention to:

- The pieces have been written in first person
- The key idea of each piece
- The pieces use personal anecdotes to explore the key ideas

#### *Activity - Ideating and Writing*

1) *Someone you were in the past*

Prompts/Instruction:

Think back to a moment in your past when you felt great. It might be that

you were totally relaxed, it might be a time when you'd achieved something that was difficult or challenging, it might be the moment when you made the perfect pancake... etc. What you're after here is a moment that was close to perfection.

#### Writing Scaffold

Place: 2-3 sentences placing us in the location

What: 2-3 sentences describing the situation

*Feeling: 2-3 sentences showing how you felt in that moment*

#### **Mentor Text 1**

##### **Yosra**

##### ***Someone you were in the past***

When I hung out with my friend at her house for the whole day.

Her Dad made us these chilli chicken burgers when I first came & we ate them talking about everything that had happened over the year as we went to different schools.

During this time, WandaVision was out & my friend had loved the Scarlet Witch since Year 6, we spent the day watching it in her room, and at the park. We got Maccas while at the park & enjoyed each other's company as it would be another year until we would see each other again.

During that time I felt my happiest as I never really saw her & we shared so much in common that I never wanted the day to end.

It is such an important memory to cherish as friends are hard to keep, especially friends who are able to have a long distance relationship, to have that is important.

##### *2) Something you value in the present*

Prompt/Instruction:

At each period in our lives we value slightly different things. Some things remain valuable over the course of our lives, but many things are particular to a moment. In this piece you're going to write about something you value now, that might be a thing that you'll continue to value or something particular to this period of your life.

#### Writing Scaffold

Place: 2-3 sentences introducing the person, thing or idea

What: 2-3 sentences describing why the person/thing/idea is important

Feeling: 2-3 sentences showing how you feel about the person/thing/idea

## ***Mentor Text 2***

### ***Venus***

#### ***Something that you value in the present***

August 31<sup>st</sup> 2006. The day, the woman that shapes me, builds me and loves me, gave birth to me. This woman guides me and continues to inspire me through her determination, strength and bravery. This woman shows me how to love, how to be one with my emotions and how to have boundaries. This woman also fights with me, she tests me and she yells at me. This woman makes me cry, makes me scream, this woman makes me crazy. So why do I love this woman? There is no answer. I just do. After all the yells, screams, and fire, there's a warm light, a light begging for me to apologise, to feel sorry, to love. To love who? To love the woman at the light, to run into her arms and feel comfort. This woman is my Mum. My best friend. My blood. My home.

#### ***3) Something that will never change***

Prompt/Instruction:

In this fragment you will write about something in your life that you believe will not change. This could be an element of your personality, something about your background, something about your values or hopes.

Writing Scaffold

Time: 2-3 sentences about when you discovered this person, thing or idea

The Thing: 2-3 sentences describing this important person, thing or idea

Why: 2-3 sentences explaining why this person, thing or idea is important

## ***Mentor Text 3***

### ***Cindy***

#### ***Something that will never change***

Some of the most important things to me are good food, slow mornings, how my mum and I go out to Cabramatta every Saturday, how my sister sends me pictures of what she's doing on a daily basis even from miles away or in a different state, how my dad brings me egg tarts from his bakery after his day at work. Something I always return to is my parents' cooking, my productive morning and my memories with friends. My core values will never change and my dreams. My love for sleep, my family and

dreams will never change.



## **Part Four**

### **Personal Essay**

#### ***Introduction***

Personal Essays are 'discursive' which is a word students will start to hear more and more as they go into years 11 and 12. A discursive piece of writing moves between different ideas and different styles. It is:

- Explanatory - sharing and explaining a view about the world
- It uses the real-life experiences of the writer - often including fragments of conversations, thoughts and observations
- It often deals with things that are emotionally important to the writer so often includes language that is poetic and lyrical alongside the more traditional analytical language of an essay.

In the piece of writing we complete in this activity we're going to include descriptive language, fragments and observations, and some poetic language.

#### ***Warm Up Activity - Sunset Colours...and associations***

##### *Activity - Warm Up*

##### *Worksheet #7*

Students will work in pairs or small groups to come up with things they associate with various sunset colours. This will be run like a word association game, where students aim to come up with answers that are expansive!

If students are working in pairs th associations could be passed between them for five rounds

##### *Word Association Example*

Student 1: Yellow makes me think of...X

Student 2: X makes me think of...Y

Student 1: Y makes me think of...Z

...repeat x 5

Students will note ideas they come up with in the spaces next to the colours.

Share will group and discuss.

##### *Writing Challenge - Cento Essay*

##### *Aim*

This writing challenge will ask students to write a discursive essay which integrates the writing of other authors. The work will be similar to a cento poem...but will include more original work from the students. Of course, it's vitally important that students

acknowledge any writing from other authors they have included in their own work!  
Students will write at least three paragraphs: based on ideas gathered in the Layers of Sunset, colour palette activity and inspired by the extracts on *Worksheet #8*.

As students work through this piece of writing they will aim to include the following elements in each of the body paragraphs they create:

- Key idea (People, Fascinations, Ideas, Memories, Plans)
- An example of their personal experience
- Words or elements from the quotes included on *Worksheet #10 and 11*

### *Activity - Ideation*

#### **Layers of my Sunset**

In this activity students will build on the ideas they have gathered in the sunset colours activity. Students will begin to think about the layers of positive elements that are in their lives.

In this activity students will gather ideas about sunsets as if the layers of colour are associated with the various positive elements from their lives.

Students allocate each of the following ideas a colour in the palette they have selected:

- People
- Fascinations
- Ideas
- Memories
- Plans

### *Student Activities*

- 1) Students select their favourite palette
- 2) Students decide which idea they associate with each colour
- 3) Allocate idea to colour
- 4) Students will briefly expand on each point - eg. People will become the particular people the student associates with that colour OR Fascination will become a brief description of a particular thing a student is interested in.

### *Ways to use these ideas in personal essays*

Personal essays often manage to surprise by expressing the unexpected connections individuals make between different (and often separate) aspects of their lives. By gathering together some aspects of life that students are interested in and feel positive about they'll be able to start thinking about some of the connections between the moments.

### *Engage with Texts*

Working in pairs students will sort the extracts on Worksheet #10 and #11 into the following categories:

- Explanatory
- Observations and Fragments
- Poetic/Lyrical Language

Discuss the decisions students have made.

Why have students placed extracts in particular categories?

Compare decisions made by different groups. Work with students to identify the elements in the extracts that they are using to categorise the quote.

### *Select Extracts*

After the extracts have been sorted into the categories students will work individually to select extracts they would like to use to include in their writing during this section of the workshop.

Each student will select at least three extracts. Ideally there will be one extract from each category. The selected extracts will act like guides for sections of the essay students will be writing.

Bonus task: students can attempt to adopt the style of the extracts they have selected ie. they'll write one section that is descriptive in style, one section that is focused on an observation/s, and one that is a little more poetic or lyrical in style.

## **Extracts/Sample Texts**

### ***Jia Tolentino***

When I feel confused about something, I write about it until I turn into the person who shows up on the paper: a person who is plausibly trustworthy, intuitive and clear

I'll admit that I'm not sure that this enquiry is even productive

What could put an end to the worst of the internet?

### ***Jess Liana***

Right now, I'm slowly letting go of my dependency on English and starting to pick up the pieces of my Indonesian.

In a 'growth mindset', people realise that they are capable of changing and

growing their most basic abilities, like intelligence and talent, through effort and dedication.

Creativity was not intended to generate billion dollar companies- it is and always will be, an investment into our own wellbeing.

Let's replace the phrase "creative person" with "a person learning creative abilities".

It is as important to organise the thoughts in our mind, as the events in our week.

You don't have to be a woman to keep a journal

Keeping a journal isn't entirely an emotional act- The act of writing accesses your left brain, which is analytical and rational.

### ***Zoya Patel***

It's almost impossible to watch a sunset and not dream

### ***Bern Williams***

We are bombarded constantly with what to think and feel instead of trusting what really is.

There's no such thing as an ugly sunset — at the same time, there's no such as an ugly life.

The days become weeks, and the weeks become months, then months turn into years. After it all, we look back to notice the commonality between the days and years and how the sunset, each in its own right beautiful and different, has helped transform us to be better people.

### ***Jeremy Divinity***

But wherever you live, Nature sends valuable messages in unique ways.

Look away for a second too long and you've missed it.

### ***Liz Davis***

Like, whenever I see the sun sink below a distant horizon as the yellows and oranges and pinks flood the sky, I inevitably think, This looks like a picture that has been extensively photoshopped.

one is presumably too innocent to have yet realised how lame it is to write about sunsets.

And so I wear the armour of cynicism, and hide behind the great walls of irony, and only glimpse beauty with my back turned to it

### ***John Green***

But I want to be earnest, even if it's embarrassing.

### *Writing Activity*

#### *Final Instructions for students*

#### *Worksheet #12, 13, 14*

- Select the three extracts from the previous activity
- These quotes will be used as inspiration for the three sections of your personal essay
- You will aim to write at least a paragraph following on from each extract
- Use ideas you've gathered from the previous both of the sunset colour activities.
- The main aim is to write about something that is important to you. We're after the positive stories that sustain you. These might be stories about other people that are important to you, places that are important, ideas that are important, aspirations or plans that are important.

*How to finish do I finish this piece of writing?*

#### *Worksheet #15*

Great ways to end a personal essay:

- Action at end
- An image at the end - concrete

- Description of an event

These conclusions to an essay give your reader something to think about, something to have an opinion about, but they also manage to underline the key point of the piece you have written.

## Examples

### ***Jia Tolentio***

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/18/outdoor-voices-blurs-the-lines-between-working-out-and-everything-else>

Ending

“The next day in Austin was cold, and the day after that it snowed. I went to a yoga class, wearing one of my OV outfits, before catching my flight back to New York. I had never been less able to distinguish what was good from what was profitable, or my life from my work. It was dark in the studio, and the ceiling sparkled like a planetarium. A sign at the back of the room read “Total Human Optimization.” In a sweet, soft voice, the instructor told us, “Every part of you that’s not active is weighing you down.”

### ***Jeremy Divinity***

<https://medium.com/@jeremydivinity/a-short-essay-another-sunset-b21bcdeaac42>

“When we look out into the sun, the sunset is our reminder that yes indeed everything will be alright. As it disappears, so do our problems of the day — as it reappears a brand new — it’s a new opportunity to become a better you. And at the end of the day — we’re always given the chance to start over again. To live for another sunset.”

Discussion: Without reading the essay, what do you believe are the key points the author might have been writing about?

Key point -

## Extra Resources

The wonderful Benjamin Law with some tips on writing and specific tips about writing autobiographical pieces.

<https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2020/07/03/benjamin-laws-top-tips-emerging-writers>

<https://www.acmi.net.au/stories-and-ideas/running-free-turning-your-life-material-benjamin-law/>

***Links to Story Factory Videos from the Sunset in My Heart Project***

[Complete version - with audio](#)

[Short version 1](#)

[Short Version 2](#)

[Short Version 3](#)