

Marsha Waldman – ELA Lesson Plan

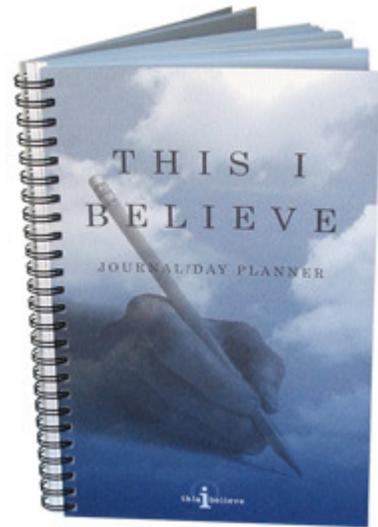
This I Believe – Personal Essay

Introduction

In this activity, students have the opportunity to explore their most heartfelt beliefs. They write personal essays, based on *This I Believe*, and explain the events that shaped them. The essays are digitally recorded as pod casts and shared with the school community through the school network (optional).

Rationale

This I Believe was a radio program created by Edward R. Murrow in the 1950s. Individuals from all walks of life read 5-minute essays about their personal philosophy, focusing on a belief or insight about life that is significant to the writer. Today, NPR periodically broadcasts *This I Believe* essays to promote understanding among people of varied backgrounds.



This essay gives students an opportunity to respond to the book *Night* by Ellie Wiesel. In the course of reading the memoir, the class extensively explores the personal beliefs of leading characters and the events that shaped them. The personal essay provides students with an age-appropriate opportunity to explore and express their own beliefs. Producing these essays as pod casts contributes to a high level of commitment among the students.

This lesson plan is based on the *This I Believe Curriculum* available from www.thisibelieve.org

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Compare the characteristics of personal essays, personal narratives, memoirs, and persuasive essays
- Make connections between their beliefs and the specific events in their lives that brought them to those beliefs
- Use journaling as a means of exploring ideas for writing
- Review the structure of effective essays (strong introduction, supporting ideas, conclusion)
- Draft, revise, and edit personal essays
- Record essays

Instructional Plan Resources

- Computers equipped with internet access, and software and microphones.
- Examples of personal essays, personal narratives, memoirs, and persuasive essays
- Copies of “Show Me the Money” worksheet
- Copies of various quotations for brainstorming
- Student writing journals
- School website (optional)

Preparation

Students will have had prior exposure to memoirs and persuasive writing.

Instruction and Activities

Session One

1. Introduce the *This I Believe* project, explaining the historical background of the program
2. Students go on the *This I Believe* website and listen to *A Doubting, Questioning Mind*, a personal essay written by a teen, and a choice of other essays.
3. For homework, students read three essays, one which is a personal essay, one personal narrative, and one a memoir.

Session Two:

1. Create a chart on the board listing the three essays by title, with columns for essay type and author’s purpose.
2. Discuss with the class the differences among the three essays and complete the chart:

Title	Essay Type	Author’s Purpose
A Doubting Questioning Mind	Personal Essay	Focused on belief or insight about life that is significant to the writer
My Pal Robert	Personal Narrative	Focused on a significant event
My First Lifeline	Personal Memoir	Focused on a significant relationship between the writer and a person, place, or object

- Discuss with the class the difference between a personal essay and a transitive essay, referring back to transitive essays they have already read or written. Discuss each point and complete the chart below:

PERSONAL	TRANSITIVE
Communicates the significance of a central idea or insight that has a deep personal meaning to the writer	Conveys information to a reader who knows less than the writer; may attempt to persuade a reader to take a particular action or believe a certain way
Purpose is more reflective, although the tone may sound persuasive	Purpose is more persuasive, an attempt to convince others to agree with the writer's position
Development of the piece is based upon the writer's personal experiences or anecdotes	Development of the piece is based upon research from credible sources
Written in first person; more conversational or entertaining in style	Written in third person; more issue-driven and formal or academic in style
Appears in an essay or Op-ed format	Appears in a real-world form such as a letter, an editorial, or a feature article
More subjective in tone	More objective in tone
Rarely requires documentation	Often requires documentation
More informal in tone, language, and subject matter	More formal in tone, language, and topic

- In Writer's Notebook, each student select one of the writing prompts that focuses on personal beliefs and writes a reflection. For example: *Everyone has problems or challenges to overcome. What obstacles are you proud to have faced and conquered?* Complete for homework.

Session Three

- Divide students into small groups (4 or 5)
- Provide the worksheet, *What do you believe?* Which lists statements such as "life is fair," "an eye for an eye," "what goes around, comes around."
- Students individually mark the belief statements true or false.
- Groups identify one shared belief.
- Each student in the group tells a personal story that demonstrates why they believe that story is true. Students record the information on the team worksheet *Show Me the Money*.
- Groups decide which story best illustrates the belief and share with the whole class.

Session Four

1. Provide students with extensive lists of adages and quotes to help them select a belief for the essay.
2. Students select a few items from the list that appeal and spend ten minutes reflecting on one or more in the writer's journals.
3. Students select one belief and create a chart for it including:
 - a. Synonyms for the belief
 - b. Graphic or verbal imagery showing it
 - c. Stories illustrating it
 - d. Rules that guide it
 - e. Misconceptions that need to be cleared up about the belief

Teacher talks with students individually, helping them with the selection process and identifying supporting stories.

Session Five

1. Review the style and organizational structure of the essay
2. Review effective essay starters: quote, questions, startling fact, etc
3. Remind students of the importance of:
 - a. Clear statement of belief
 - b. Specific examples that make the point by telling a story
 - c. Appropriate, personal tone
4. Distribute "Tips" sheet
5. Students draft essay

Session Six

1. Students continue drafting essay
2. Teacher conducts writer's conferences with students

Session Seven

1. Students meet with a writing partner and peer edit
2. Students revise essays
3. Teacher conducts writer's conferences with students

Session Eight

1. Students revise
2. Teacher conducts writer's conferences with students

Session Nine

1. Final essays are due
2. Students are instructed in the use of recording equipment and software

Session Ten

1. Students complete and edit recordings

2. Students select images and music to accompany pod casts (optional)

Session Eleven

Celebration! Students listen to one another's pod casts.

Student Assessment/Reflections

A rubric is used to assess student work. It includes the following criteria:

- A personal belief is clearly stated
- Reasons for the belief are clearly illustrated
- The tone is appropriate and personal
- The introduction effectively gets the reader's attention
- Writing is clear, with good sentence structure and word choice
- Mechanics are correct

NY State ELA Standards

Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

- Write original literary texts
- create social, historical, and/or cultural context
- create multiple levels of meaning
- Write interpretive and responsive essays of approximately three to five pages to express judgments and support them through references to the text, using direct quotations and paraphrase
- explain how the author's use of literary devices affects meaning
- compare and contrast the treatment of literary elements in different genres and by more than one author
- engage in a variety of prewriting experiences, such as using a variety of visual representations, to express interpretations, feelings, and new insights
- Use resources, such as personal experience, knowledge from other content areas, and independent reading, to create literary, interpretive, and responsive texts
- Maintain a portfolio that includes literary, interpretive, and responsive writing