RIFFInsiders Case Study on “Danny”

Bloomsburg High School

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**Introductory Letter**

My RIFFInsider at Bloomsburg High School has been a great opportunity to get some field experience before student teaching. My own high school experience was limited to honors classes with the same students so I had a very narrow view on what goes on in regular classrooms. This gave me the opportunity to work with a student who has a very different high school experience from my own. Working with the cooperating teacher also allowed me to get an honest opinion week to week about the progress of my student and teaching in general. I learned about how they sequence lessons and units in the real world which is something I need to do in order to make my own units fit into my cooperating teacher’s when I student teach and with other units when I actually have a classroom of my own. I got to see her in action with an actual class while being more than just an observer.

I got the opportunity to work closely with Danny for about ten weeks and watch as he progressed through the last half of his senior year. We worked on assignments for his twelfth grade English class as well as assignments for his PSSA study island course. I used this time to learn more about Danny and how he learned to use in my later planning. It gave me the opportunity to plan for an individual student based on personal experience instead of a hypothetical classroom. It allowed me to include specific activities that could be tailored to how he learned. I felt that I knew him more because of this close association which gave me a more inside perspective than my observation hours did. It also gave me practice proofreading papers and assignments which I have not had as much experience with as I would like. I think the experience is something that all education majors should go through during their college career so they can make sure that it is actually what they want to do with the rest of their lives. My experience has only reassured me that I am making the right choice.

**Artifact 1 - Class Observation**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Observation** | **Interpretation** |
| 1pm – Class starts  1:04  1:06  1:15  1:18  1:39 | Folders handed out, most students sit quietly – Danny sits in the back quietly.  Students got with a partner for comparison of answers from hw – Danny sat with his partner and discussed other things  Got back together to compare answers as a whole class – Danny put his head down  Fidgeting his legs, answered questions when called on.  Moved onto “Ballad of Birmingham”  Listened to a recording of the poem. Danny paid attention for about 1 minute of it then put his head down again  Used highlighters to identify the voice of the poem  Review literary terms like irony, symbolism  Teacher led them through exactly what they should circle.  -Work through poem stanza by stanza  - Danny got up walked around room twice during this part of the lesson  - knocked his highlighters around the desk  Kids pack up.  Danny was one of the first at the door. | Most of the kids seem pretty well behaved but they are suspiciously quiet for the beginning of the class. I suspect that they are tired by this period of the day (period 10)  Danny didn’t discuss his hw with his partner. I was close enough to hear their conversation but he didn’t say whether he didn’t do his hw or whether he just didn’t want to. Both boys talked very animatedly about what they were doing later that day. Mostly about hanging out with friends and Danny mentioned going to practice.  Danny didn’t seem very engaged with this lesson and I think it’s because he truly doesn’t enjoy poetry and so checked out early on. He was fidgety because he was probably that uninterested. However, contrary to his outward appearance he was paying enough attention to answer when he was called on.  The switch of approaches seemed to bring Danny around a little but he lost interest after about 1 minute. I think it comes back to the poetry aspect. He didn’t necessarily mind the video but he didn’t care about the poem and lost interest. Most of the other students watched the video quietly but some seemed disengaged like Danny.  Danny did this activity as long as the teacher told them exactly what to highlight. As soon as she started talking about something else he would look out the window, play with his highlighters, or fidget. Danny got up twice while doing this activity just to walk to over to the trashcan. He only had a small piece of ripped paper each time so he probably could have waited to through it away. I wonder if he has some sort of attention disorder since he consistently fidgeted throughout the lesson and each activity only held his attention for a couple of minutes. When he got up twice the teacher didn’t say anything about it so maybe it is something that she knows he does to relieve some of his excess energy.  Danny had been so clearly bored throughout the lesson despite the fact that he at least stayed with the group, and so he was packed up and ready to go the second she wrapped up the lesson. |

**Annotation 1 –**

Today’s class was an observation class period. My first impression of the class was that they were very well behaved as a class, especially a class full of seniors. They all sat quietly throughout and didn’t cause any problems for the teacher. The class itself is small and has only about 15 people. This class is a PSSA class for seniors who for whatever reason did not do as well as they could have on the test in their eleventh grade year. I think some people would assume that a class like this would have problems but for the most part they are all working towards finishing their achievement tests that say they pass the program with good attention to their work.

My student, “Danny”, while not causing a distraction was not particularly engaged throughout the class period. He had expressed to me that he hated reading, in particular he hated poetry and this class was exclusively focused on a poem called “The Ballad of Birmingham”. This poem was used in a larger unit that analyzed different types of writings centered on one event: a bombing that happened in Birmingham during the Civil Rights Movement. I did not see the rest of this unit but this poetry lesson did not engage Danny’s attention at all. He spent the majority of the class fidgeting around, playing with his highlighters, and looking out the window. He followed along well enough to be able to answer the questions directed at him but when he wasn’t being questioned he zoned out. I’m not sure what exactly would hold his attention to a poetry lesson because at the very mention of a poem he tunes out.

It will be interesting to see Danny throughout more of his lessons and how he behaves when I spend one on one time with him in the next few weeks. I think I will have to try to plan to capture his attention at the beginning so that he doesn’t simply tune out of the conversation as he had done in class today. It seems that he has limited interests and so I’m really going to have to play on those interests to get his cooperation.

**Artifact 2 – Student Interview**

Q: So how do you like school in general?

A: It’s ok. I get kinda bored though in most of my classes…

Q: So it doesn’t really hold your interest?

A: Well not really. I’m ok in math and shop but English isn’t my …..

Q: Favorite?

A: Yeah it’s not my favorite.

Q: What about it don’t you like?

A: I don’t know I can’t really pay attention. I have a horrible memory so when she’s like what did we read about I’m like, “I don’t know, did we read something?”

Q: So you don’t particularly like reading then?

A: Not really. The book I’m reading now is better than the others I’ve read so far but for the most part I don’t like it.

Q: What book are you reading now?

A: Tuesdays with Morrie.

Q: So what about that book do you like?

A: I don’t know. It’s not hard. It actually happened I think. I don’t know it’s just good I guess.

Q: Ok so maybe you just enjoy non-fiction to fiction. That’s when the story actually happened.

A: Yeah I guess I do.

Q: So what do you do outside of class?

A: I play baseball. I’m actually going to college to play baseball on a scholarship. So I usually just do that. Besides that, I don’t know hanging out with my friends and stuff.

Q: So you’re pretty busy outside of class then?

A: yeah baseball takes up a lot of time.

Q: Well that’s fabulous. I was never that competitive in the sports I played so I never expected to play them in college. So, in your English class you’re going to be doing Macbeth next. Do you know anything about that play?

A: Not at all. I’ve never even heard about it but it’s written weird and I didn’t understand it when we started reading it.

Q: Well Shakespeare can be pretty difficult but we’re gonna get you through it. Maybe you’ll end up liking it.

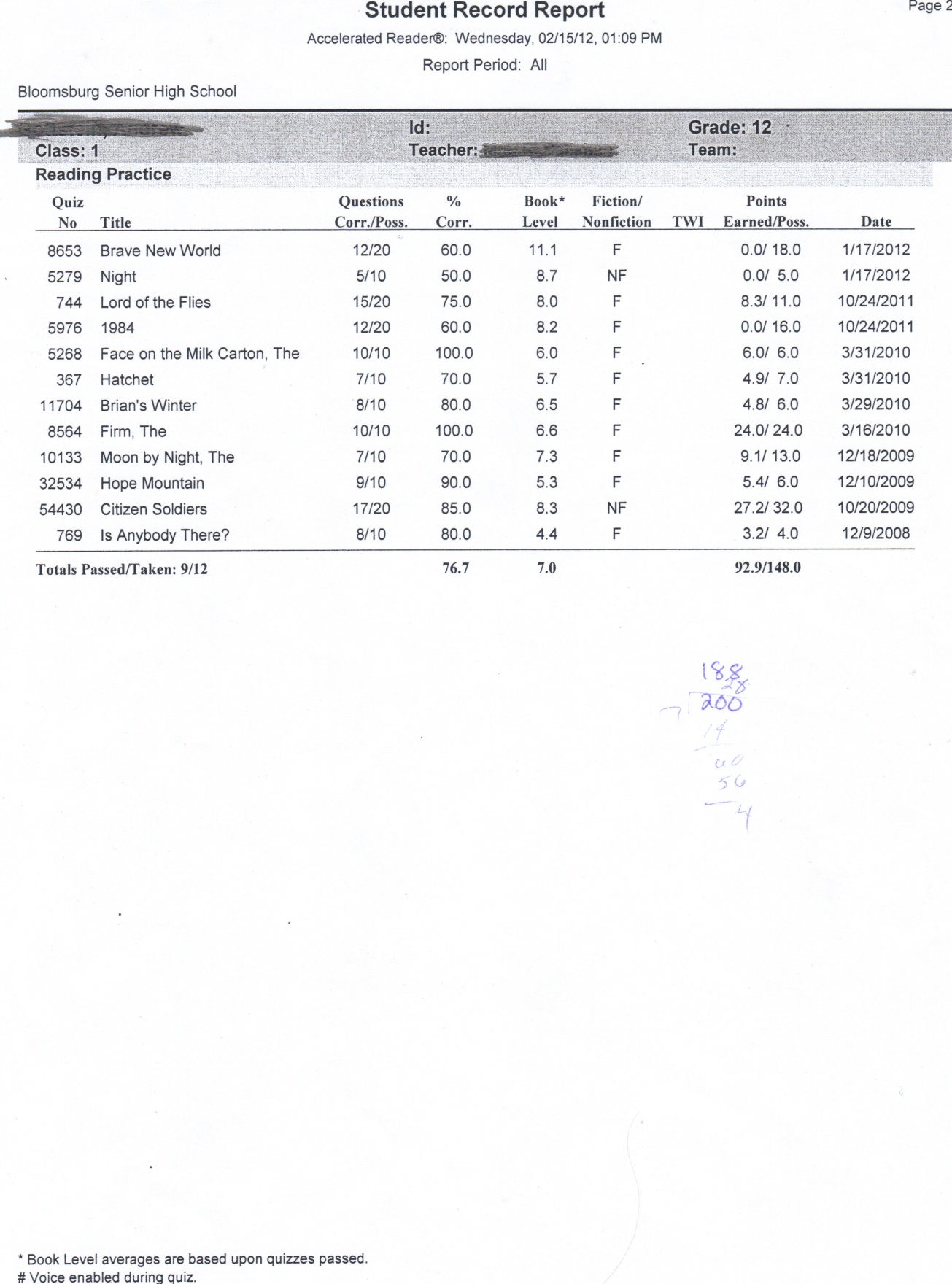
A: I doubt that but if I don’t have to do the whole thing by myself I’ll be ok.

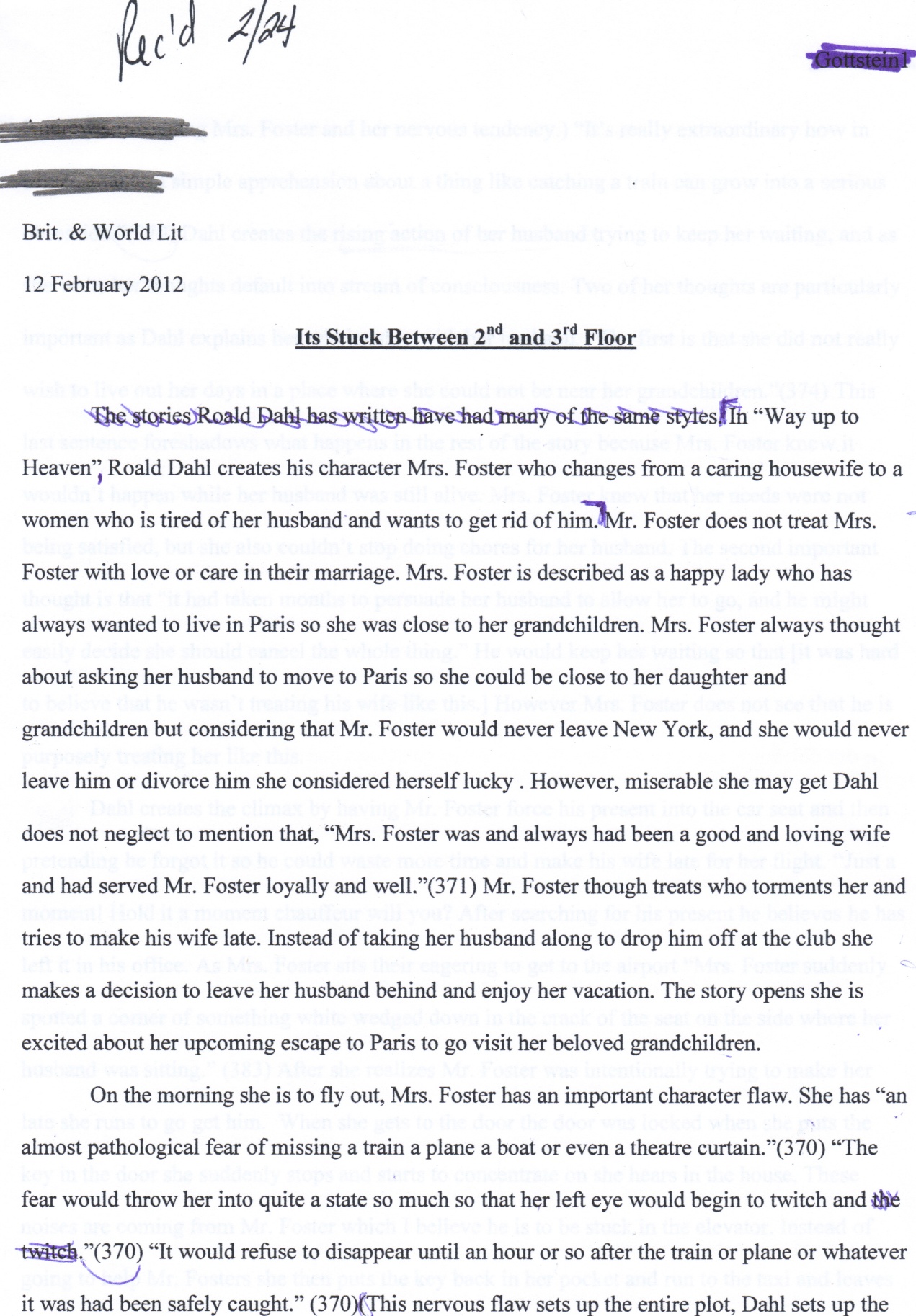
**Annotation 2**

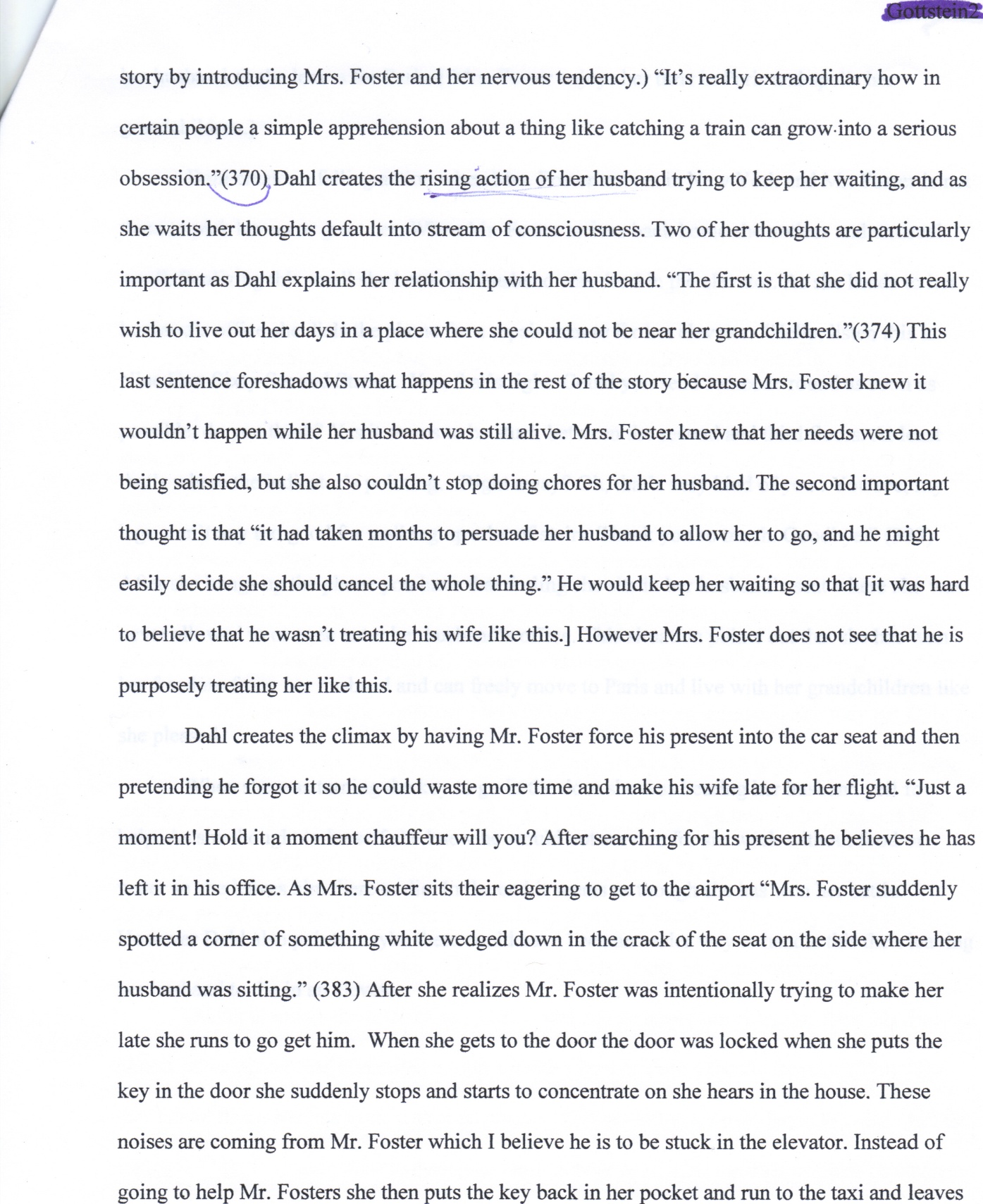
I conducted this interview in a different way then I originally anticipated when I began my case study at Bloomsburg High School. I had planned to sit “Danny” down to have a formal interview with him but I realized that I had already asked him many of the questions that I planned to ask him. Danny does much better in less formal settings and gets very fidgety and nervous when he feels that he is being interrogated so this approach worked better with him. This way he didn’t actually realize that his words would be used later for this interview. Talking this way actually makes Danny respond more since he seems to like being asked for his opinion.

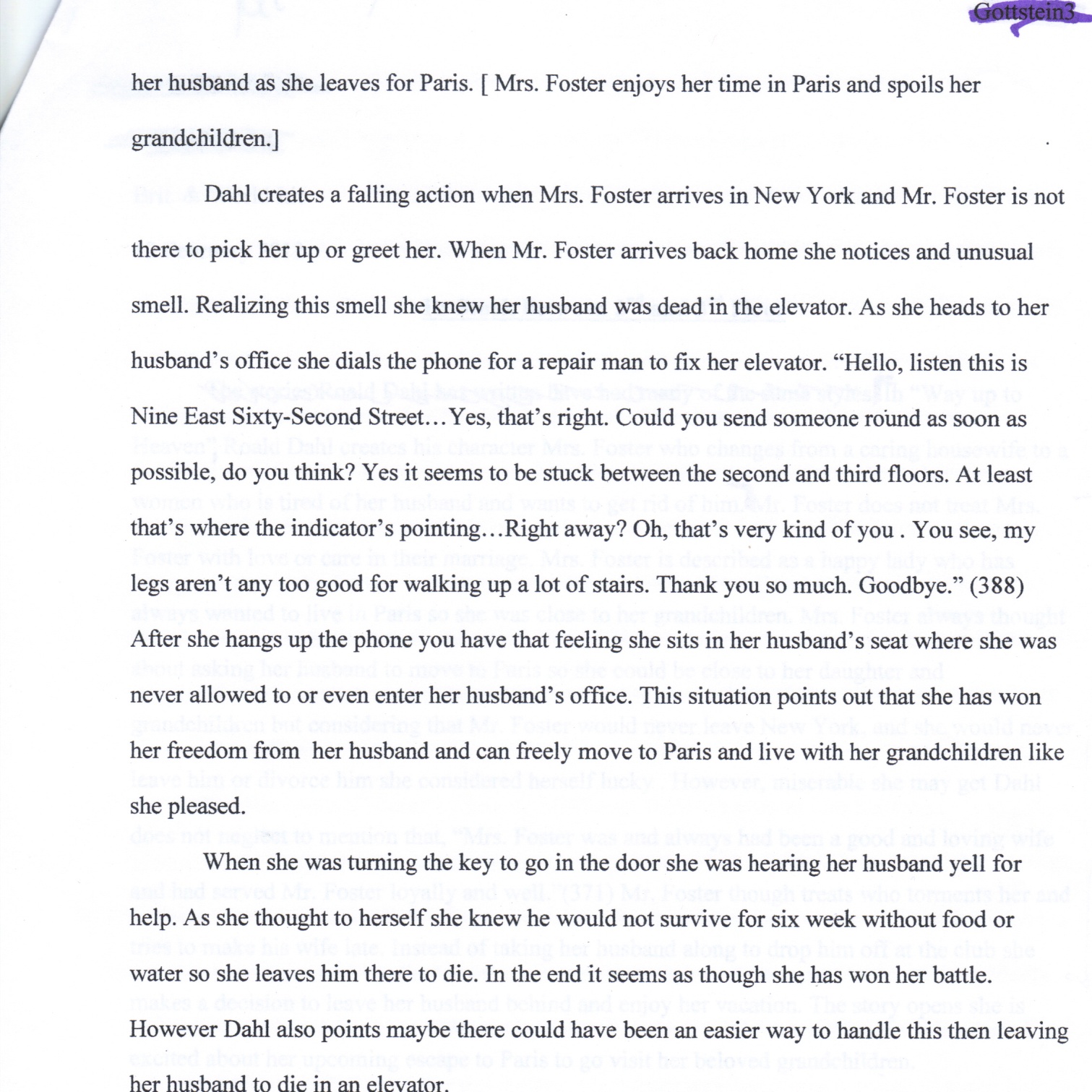
Using these interview questions I aimed to find out what types of books he likes and actually wants to read and how he likes his English class. Danny does not enjoy reading. In fact he doesn’t enjoy most things except for baseball. If you ask him a question about baseball he can list every rule of the game and facts about players for hours. He does seem to like non-fiction more than fiction when he does choose to read. When I choose which book to write my lessons for I will try to take Danny’s love of baseball into account and find a book that he can relate to.

**Artifact 3 – Student Work**

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**Annotation 3 -**

Studying Danny’s reading results I could see a trend in his scores. He did relatively well in lower grades and I think that it had a lot to do with his reading level. Books that stayed around a ninth grade level seemed relatively challenging to him. It was only until his senior year that his scores dropped noticeably. This is also when the level of books read in class increased. He had a hard time with Brave New World by Aldous Huxley in particular and understandably so because it is a difficult book. He also seems to so better reading non-fiction books like Tuesdays with Morrie (not recorded on this sheet). There could be any number of reasons for his reading level staying the same and I don’t think that it has anything to do with being lazy or stupid. I think that since he doesn’t like to read, he doesn’t read and then he never gets better and a cycle begins.

The other piece of his work is an example of a paper that he had to rewrite for his teacher to resubmit. He had plagiarized the majority of the first one and on his second submission simply summarized the story for his teacher. He also had problems with quoting things and didn’t know how to cite his sources from the book. He had a paragraph that was just quotes with no explanation or original thought in it. When we went through the paper together I had to teach him how to incorporate them properly into his paper. When there are informal writing assignments he can do them fine but he struggles with the formal rules of a Standard American English essay.

**Artifact 4 – Teacher Interview**

Q: How do you see Danny as a student overall?

A: Danny is a very personable child. He’s a bit of a charmer but he sometimes uses that charm to try to get out of working hard. He doesn’t seem that motivated overall and is sometimes absent minded in class. I have to remind him a lot throughout class to pay attention. He also “forgets” things when you call on him and I think a lot of that comes from social pressure where he doesn’t want his friends to make fun of him.

Q: What would be some of Danny’s strengths?

A: You know sometimes Danny really surprises me. For the most part he is not very motivated in class and then we’ll do one assignment that really gets him going. For example, we recently did a poetry assignment and each student had to write a poem about someone they knew. After hearing the other poems from his classmates he actually asked if he could redo his and came back with a beautiful poem about his grandfather that he actually got extra credit on.

Q: What would be some of Danny’s weaknesses?

A: I think Danny lacks some basic reading comprehension skills and he doesn’t look past the surface in many works that we have done. He also tries to cover up things when he doesn’t do them well and I think that goes back to the social pressure of not looking stupid to his classmates.

Q:What are some strategies that you think would really help Danny in the classroom?

A: Well, he is a very visual and kinesthetic learner so things like graphic organizers, charts, storyboarding, anything that he can visually see and work through himself is helpful. My student teacher is using some of these things in her teaching including some acting activities so I think that he will be more interested in the material than in some of the other units.

Q: What is the hardest thing about teaching in general?

A: I would say time. Keeping up with everything, getting things graded in a timely fashion. However, you will have to deal with that the entire length of your career so there’s really nothing to do but do the best you can.

Q: Have the PSSA’s affected your classrooms and the content that you teach?

A: Not particularly because I teach only senior classes. You know I think that for the most part the PSSA’s teach minimal skills that kids need to know and so I do think that some benchmark test is appropriate. Now obviously this class is for those seniors who did not score high enough on the PSSA’s and so for this particular class I focus more on basic skills than on particular works of literature.

Q: How do you choose books for your curriculum?

A: I try to find books with universal themes that all students could relate to or use in their own lives. For example, in comp studies everyone has to read Night by Elie Wiesel because I think that they can all learn something, or take away something from it. In BritLit, they have a little more choice with their Lit Circle books and they do get to choose which one is more interesting to them.

Q: How do you stay organized with all of your materials and lesson plans?

A: Really the only thing to do is to develop a system and stick with it. I have folders on my computer for every class, every unit, every lesson activity. I have paper folders in my filing cabinets that I use for all of my classes work. It’s easy to become disorganized and so I really have to work to be on top of it. I also force my students to have a system of organization because I think it will really help them when they get to college.

Q: Any advice for first time teachers or student teachers?

A: I would say to enjoy the little accomplishments of every day. There will be times when you feel disheartened but you can’t let them ruin the experience for you. If even one student improves on something than that is something that you celebrate. You shouldn’t expect to be a miracle worker because you’ll just be disappointed in the end. I’ve had student teachers who go through the process and then don’t become teachers because it doesn’t live up to their expectations. Also, to have lessons that you yourself enjoy. If you enjoy teaching it then the students are more likely to respond than when you teach a lesson you obviously dislike.

**Annotation 4**

I started this interview asking specific questions about Danny’s academic success. I have to say that many of her answers fell in with what I had already noticed about Danny. She told me that he often tries to charm his way out of doing things. He has tried to “charm” me a couple of times to try to get me to help him finish an assignment. He hasn’t quite figured out that while I will help him, I’m not there to do it for him. I’ve also noticed that he is well known and that when we walk to the library he is frequently stopped by other students who make remarks about him being with what they assume is a tutor. I just give them the “walk-away-and-go-to-where-you-belong” teacher look until they leave but I can tell that these opinions affect Danny.

Her notes about Danny’s strengths and weaknesses were pretty spot with what I had thought. He lacks some basic comprehension skills and has trouble looking abstractly at books. He is really struggling with *Macbeth* and doesn’t understand the story beyond the plot. He enjoyed *Tuesdays With Morrie* which is more straightforward and I believe that he liked it because of this. Then he writes a poem like the one he wrote about his grandfather and blows everyone away. It seems that even though he can do the work he chooses not to unless it has a deep personal connection his life or baseball. When he can personally relate to the material he blows away all expectations of his ability.

As far as her notes on teaching itself go there was not much I didn’t expect. Her biggest suggestions were to always be organized with materials and to enjoy the little achievements of the day. These are ideas that will help me when I actually am in control of my own classroom. It is encouraging that this teacher can still enjoy the little things that keep her going back to work every day.

**Artifact 5-**

Q: How long have you known Danny?

A: 4 years

Q:What exactly was your relationship to him?

A:Baseball coach

Q: How would you describe Danny (personality wise)?

A: Danny is outgoing and easy to get along with. Around sports he has a competitive attitude and a desire to do his best.

Q: What would you say would be his best qualities?

A: Fun natured and playful antics.

Q: Something he could work on?

A: Danny can get down on himself, especially when things are not going his way.

Q: Now from an outsider perspective how would you describe his academics? (If this is something beyond your knowledge then that it’s fine not to answer)

A: N/A

Q: How about peer groups? How does he interact around his friends?

A: From what I see at practice and games he gets along with his teammates and is liked by most.

Q: What about Danny’s potential for the future? He is going to school for criminal justice, how do you see this playing out for him? If Danny stays positive, continues to improve his work ethic and continues to mature as a person the sky is the limit.

A: Only Danny will be able to answer this question.

Q:Any other comments?

A: I’ve never had Danny in school so I can’t speak for his academics. I’ve been on the coaching staff for all 4 years Danny has played but he has only played under my supervision for 1 JV season. I’m sorry I couldn’t be more specific with my answer but quite frankly I’ve seen Danny very little throughout his high school career.

**Annotation 5 –**

For an outside perspective on Danny his baseball coach seemed the perfect choice. Most of what he had to say reinforced my opinions of Danny so far. He is a very competitive individual when it is something he feels he can do, like baseball. The one time I have seen this in his school work with the poem about his grandfather. He really tired because he heard a similar poem written by another student and knew that he could produce something that would be even better. He needs to feel the competition of things. He also seems very outgoing; when we walk to together because everyone seems to know him in the hallways, students and teachers alike. His “fun nature” and “playful antics” I see enough of when we work together one-on-one. This is the way he acts with his friends so on one level I know that it is his way of relating to me. The coach seems to understand the social side of Danny that is really a bigger part of his life than the academic side of him.

He didn’t have much to say about Danny’s future and I think that this is because of a lack of contact in the academic world. He has seen the competitive side of Danny that wants to do his best at something he loves. However, he also knows how Danny can get down on himself when he doesn’t understand something or doesn’t do something to his full potential that he cares about. I hope that he can do what he loves and excel academically when he reaches the next level of education.

**Part 2 – Planning Instruction**

**Rationale –**

Who am I? What makes me, me? These are questions that many young adults deal with as they go through their adolescence. The answers are not easy for many students to find. It is important to understand the many different things that students deal with on a daily basis that shape them and influence who they are and who they will become. *Mexican Whiteboy* by Matt de la Pena tells the story of Danny, a half-white half-Mexican boy who decides to visit his father’s family for the summer. He has trouble figuring out who he is and where he fits in at his school and even within his own family. While the particular situation that Danny encounters is different than students in many classes, they can all relate to a young boy trying to find his place in the world he lives in.

In this small unit, we will address the question: How do we define who we are? I chose this text because it is not at a very high reading level so it will not be a hard book for the students in this class. My focus student really enjoys baseball and pitches for the school’s baseball team. This book not only has themes of identity that students can relate to but the main character plays baseball so it connects directly with my student. My unit uses a lot of techniques to have students think about their own lives and their own identities to relate to the young adults in Pena’s novel. This will allow them to practice and get into a habit of writing about themselves and about their thoughts which I think is not emphasized enough in schools. I think the focus is on state tests and getting the scores to go onto college instead of the students themselves. A student can go through twelve years of school and then four more of college and not have a clue about themselves or what they really feel and believe. Knowing themselves will help these students in every aspect of their life, not just in their schooling.

**Lesson 1:**

**Big Question**: How do we define who we are?

**Unit Goals**

Examine the influences that affect how we see ourselves.

Look for specific influences on identity and determine how they affected both main characters in *Mexican Whiteboy*.

What are the positive and the negative effects of people’s opinions on our identities?

**Lesson Goals**

Students will think about what identity means to them and the different ways that they define themselves.

Students will free-write to think about the different influences that have made them into who they are today in order to apply this knowledge towards understanding the characters of *Mexican Whiteboy.*

Students will make character maps in order to determine the characteristics/influences of Danny and Uno, the main characters of *Mexican Whiteboy*.

**Materials**

Big Posterboard

Markers

Whiteboard (for the beginning)

Fishbowl

**Activities**

(5 min) Take attendance, pass out any homework, announcements etc.

(10 minutes) Students will have about 5 minutes to free write about the following questions: How do you define yourself? Think of any influences that you have in your lives that make you feel this way about yourself. After about 5 minutes, volunteers will tell the class what they wrote. Then as a class we will write down all of the influences that people recorded having an impact on their identities. Then introduce the book saying that this book is about a boy who is struggling with his identity because he doesn’t know where he fits in.

(15 minutes) Students will then separate into groups to do a character map activity. Each group (about 3 people) will go through what they have read so far in the book and create a character map for Danny or for Uno. They will draw a picture and decorate their poster with words, symbols, colors, anything that represents that character as a person. They will also use this poster to illustrate the influences that they feel influenced the characters. With each influence they should decide whether this is a positive influence or a negative influence on the identities of the two boys.

(5 minutes) Each group will have the chance to present their poster to the class and explain what their symbols pictures etc. stand for and how they fit for their character. Since there would have been two of each group we will then compare the two to see what the groups placed in common and what was different. These answers will then be contrasted against our list from the beginning of class and the students will see how alike they are to Danny and Uno even though they might not have had a similar experience to the boys in their own lives.

(5 minutes) Since this is the beginning of a new unit I will give the students time to write down a fishbowl question that will be addressed as we go through the rest of the novel. These will be kept in a bowl on my desk throughout the unit.

**Assessment**

Assessment for this lesson would be slightly different because most of the work is opinion based. I will collect their freewrite at the beginning just to see what types of things they were coming up with. As long as they identify some influences, like their parents or grandparents, they will get credit for that assignment. Specifically the boys fathers, Danny’s Uncles, Sofia, Uno’s brother, Manuel. These would all be good people to list as possible influences. In the character map activity I can’t grade them on their artistic ability but I would say that they should have at least three picture (or something else to represent one of the boys) and be able to explain for the class their reasoning behind each then they should get full credit for that assignment.

**Lesson 2**

**Big Question:** How do we define who we are?

**Unit Goals**

Examine the influences that affect how we see ourselves.

Look for specific influences on identity and determine how they affected both main characters in *Mexican Whiteboy*.

What are the positive and the negative effects of people’s opinions on our identities?

**Lesson Goals**

Students will decide on a scene that has the most significance to the story and the characters so far.

Students will write a small summary of their chosen scene (as a group) to explain why that scene was so significant to the character’s development.

Each group will present a poster detailing their scene in order to explain their two reasons and evidence for their choice.

**Materials**

Big posters

Markers

Book

Fishbowl questions

**Activities**

(5 minutes) Housekeeping Details

(5 minutes) Students will think about a scene from the novel that they found particularly important to the story so far. This scene should be one that they feel reveals something special about either of the main characters, shows a crossroads a character faces, or a scene where one of the characters has an epiphany. After they have thought or written for about 5 minutes they will share with their neighbor which scene they thought was most important.

(10 minutes) Students then group together with a larger group of about five students each. As a group they will decide on a scene that they all agree is the most important so far in the story. As a group they will write a small summary (about 5 sentences) of the scene and describe why this scene was so important to the overall story. They must have at least two reasons for choosing this scene and have at least one text example to support it. On a big poster they will write their reasons down to show the class.

(15 minutes) Then as a whole class each group presents their poster to the class. Each group will describe why this scene stuck out to them. After each group presents the other classmates will ask any questions that they had about the groups decisions for their scene and poster. After all of the groups have presented we will see what similarities popped up between groups. Was there one scene that repeated itself? Were they about the same character? How do these scenes inform us about the nature of these characters.

(5 minutes) As this is now a halfway point in the book and the students will have read 125 pgs. by this point we will take the last few minutes to see if any of our fishbowl questions have been answered by this point. I will pull five questions out of the jar to see if we can answer them. Ones that we cannot answer yet we will be placed back in the jar.

**Assessment**

Each student needs to be writing quietly at the beginning of class about their chosen section of the book. The group activity will be graded based on participation. Each group member must share their ideas about which section to select and also then must help create the summary and poster to present to the class as a whole. The poster itself will not be graded on artistic ability but I will be looking for specific examples as to why this selection was chosen. For example, a student , may say they chose a section because it was the scene where he met his father again after 2 years and it was a major turning point in the novel. They must include at least 2 reasons for choosing this scene and have at least one quote from the book to support their claims about their scene. The answer, “I picked this because if it didn’t happen the book wouldn’t have happened” or “I liked it” are not accepted as reasons. Scenes that have to do with relations between the members of Danny and Uno’s family would be especially good for this activity. Then they would proceed into the specifics of the scene

**Lesson 3**

**Big Question:** How do we define who we are?

**Unit Goals**

Examine the influences that affect how we see ourselves.

Look for specific influences on identity and determine how they affected both main characters in *Mexican Whiteboy*.

What are the positive and the negative effects of people’s opinions on our identities?

**Lesson Goals**

Students will popcorn read the last chapter of the book in order to review the events in order to aid in class discussion.

Students will use the discussion questions to help their understanding of the last chapter and the messages of the book.

Students will use the last fishbowl entries in order to answer any lingering questions about the story.

**Materials**

Book

Fishbowl questions

**Activities**

(5 minutes) – Housekeeping Details.

(10 minutes) – We will take the time to popcorn read the last chapter of the book as a class. Each student must read at least a paragraph of the chapter.

(15 minutes) – Class Discussion about the last chapter. We will attempt to answer whether or not Danny and Uno have resolved any of their issues now that we are at the end of the book. Have either of the boys come up with answers to help them decide who they are? Danny used to care about other’s opinions of his race, does he at the end of the novel? Will Danny come to term with the differences within his family and accept their love? What do they decide to do at the end of the book? Do you think that Danny will reunite with his father? What about Uno? Will Uno really go to live with his father in Oxnard? This discussion will be more of a reader response to see how the students think about the end of the story and to see what they think will happen in the future. Students will take notes on the answers for their notebooks. This will help them later on when there is a quiz.

(10 minutes) We will finish this class with the last fishbowl questions. Most of them should be answerable now that the book is done. We will read through them and answer them as a class. Any that we might not be able to answer will be discussed as a class to see why we cannot answer them.

**Assessment**

Students will need to take notes throughout this lesson on the ending of the book. Each student will receive points for participating in the reading of the book. This is just a participation grade and they won’t be graded on their verbal reading skills. In the class discussion I will also be looking for student participation. By the end of the novel, Danny has accepted a lot of his diversity and come to an understanding about his mother and father. He decides to forgive his mother for what he saw as a type of abandonment and plans to go see his father in jail. Uno decides to take a chance and go to his father’s house in Oxnard. These plot elements will help the students answer the discussion questions from the class discussion. I will be able to judge from their answers whether or not they have read the book up till this point. They will explain the meaning behind their answers so that I can see their thought process.