Unit 3

Title: “An American Childhood” by Annie Dillard

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.4; W.7.2, W.7.4, W.7.7, W.7.9; SL.7.1, SL.7.5, SL.7.6; L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.4

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Some life experiences are better understood through the lens of competitive sports.

Synopsis

Seven-year old Annie Dillard enjoys playing football with the boys in her neighborhood because it requires her to play whole-heartedly and with concentration and courage. One snowy day, Dillard and the boys are mischievously throwing snowballs at passing cars and a man driving one of the targeted cars stops and jumps out to confront the children. They all run in different directions, but the man chases after Dillard and her friend Mikey. The two children run down alleys, through backyards, and over fences in hopes of losing the man, but he refuses to give up the chase. Finally, the man grabs them. After he catches his breath, he lectures the equally breathless and exhausted children. Dillard is exhilarated because she has met someone who really challenges her to do her best in the chase. (From Prentice Hall Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes Bronze, 2002)

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| What do we learn about the narrator? Cite evidence from the text to support your response. | The narrator is a girl who was taught how to play football by boys. She considers football a “fine sport.” “You thought up a new strategy…You went out for a pass…Best, you got to thrown yourself mightily at someone’s running leg.” She enjoys the challenge of the game and the effort that it requires of its players. “Your fate, and your team’s score, depended on your concentration and courage. Nothing girls did could compare with it.” She lives for the game and would much rather play football than engage in the activities that are traditionally played by girls. |
| “Boys welcomed me at baseball, too, for I had through enthusiastic practice, what was weirdly known as a boy’s arm.” What does this statement reveal about Dillard? Use evidence from the text to support your response. | Dillard enjoys sports and the boys respect her athletic abilities. The statement also reveals that Annie is determined and she puts her all into things that are important to her. Dillard prefers to play football with the boys because “nothing girls did could compare to it”. |
| When Dillard hits the car with a snowball, a man gets out and begins to chase her. She describes the man as “a thin man, all action.” What does Dillard mean by “all action”? How does the man live up to this description? Cite evidence from the text to support your response. | Dillard uses the term “all action” to describe her pursuer because he is able to chase her and Mikey to the point where they are running for their lives. To their surprise, the man continues to chase them. “He chased us silently over picket fences, through thorny hedges….Every time I glanced back, choking for breath, I expected he would have quit.” He did not give up and he was determined to catch them. |
| Dillard states, “It was an immense discovery,….that this ordinary adult evidently knew what I thought only children, who trained at football knew: that you have to fling yourself at what you’re doing, you have to point yourself, forget yourself, aim, dive.” What led Annie to this discovery? | Dillard realizes that her pursuer understands the importance of investing your all into a situation by his relentless pursuit of her and Mikey. Although it is snowing and he is dressed for work, he is determined to catch the kids at all cost. |
| Dillard describes her pursuer as her “hero.” Why does Dillard consider her pursuer her hero? Cite evidence from the text to support your response. | Dillard describes her pursuer as her hero because he has won the game. “He caught us and we all stopped….There was no one around: a clearing in a grove, and we the only players.” Through this experience, Dillard also learns that perseverance can be useful beyond the football field. “The point was that he had chased us passionately without giving up…” |
| Upon being caught by her pursuer, Dillard states, “I was cherishing my excitement.” What does this statement reveal about the impact that the chase has had on her? Use evidence from the text to support your response. | Dillard is so exhilarated by the chase that she has forgotten why she is even being pursued by the man. “I had some difficulty at first recalling why we were there.” Annie is in awe of the effort that the man has put into capturing her and Mikey. “I wanted the glory to last forever.” |
| Something that is done perfunctorily is done with little interest or care. Why does Dillard use the word perfunctorily to describe how her pursuer lectures her about hitting his car with a snowball? | Perfunctorily is used to describe the manner in which the man lectured Dillard because Dillard the lecture is of little consequence. “…for the chewing out was redundant, a mere formality.” Nothing that the man could have said after catching Annie and Mikey would have as great of an impact on her as the pursuit itself. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | scruffy  mazy  hedge  immense  frantic  simultaneously  sopping  staked | trafficked  reverted  spherical  embarked  compelled  impelled  improvising  exhilirated  dismayed  obscure  cherishing |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | wholeheartedly  crenellated  prow  piecemeal | translucent  labyrinths  perfuntorily  redundant  dismembered  exalting  righteous |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt:

*The opening paragraph of Annie Dillard’s personal narrative, “Am American Childhood,” describes the act of playing football. However, the primary action of the narrative centers on Dillard and her friend Mickey being chased by a man because they and their friends threw snowballs at his car. At the end of this chase, Dillard states, “We all played by the rules”. In a one to two page essay, examine how this chase scene, along with this quote, mirrors this description of football in the opening paragraph, explaining how this football motif is used to convey the central idea of the narrative. Make sure to examine the actions of the children being pursued and the adult pursuing them, citing specific evidence from the text.*

* Teacher Instructions

This paper is a literary response and analysis. Students should be encouraged to develop a strong thesis statement and use evidence from the text to support it. Encourage students to elaborate on their evidence to show how the evidence supports their thesis statement. This paper will be first started as an on-demand essay, which will be used as a first draft to develop into a polished final draft. This paper can be assigned as an on-demand writing task or a process paper.

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “If you gathered and joined body and soul and pointed them diving fearlessly….you’d stop the ball.” | Shutting down your opponent depends on your relentless focus and ability to put every fiber of your being into the game. |
| “We kept running, block after block; we kept improvising…..running a frantic course and choosing it simultaneously.” | The narrator and Mikey do not have a strategy to get away from the driver and strategy is crucial for success. |
| “It was an immense discovery….that this ordinary adult knew what I thought that only children who trained at football knew: that you have to fling yourself at what you’re doing.” | The narrator understands that the driver is applying the rules of football as he chases her and Mikey throughout the city. |
| “He chased us silently…..Every time I glanced back, choking for breath, I expected he would have quit.” | The driver is determined to catch the narrator and Mikey and determination is an essential component of wining. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Using their notes—answers to the questions, chart, developed thesis statement—students respond to the prompt on-demand during the class period.
3. After the on-demand writing session, students will revise their essay through multiple drafts to create a final draft (see W.7.5). With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go). Students should be working together through the writing process: writing, revising, editing, and publishing (pre-writing was done earlier with the work on the questions).

* Sample Answer

In the narrative, “An American Childhood,” the young narrator learns an essential life lesson that is made clear through her understanding of football and her experience of engaging in a serious game of chase with an angry driver whose car she hit with a snowball. The narrator comes to understand the power of putting everything that you have—mentally, physically— into whatever you are doing.

As the text opens, the narrator is reflecting on her experience learning to play football which she considers “fine sport”. She appreciates the mental and physical challenges presented by the game of football. “You thought up a new strategy for every play and whispered it to the others….Best, you got to throw yourself mightily at someone’s running legs”. She describes football as being an “all or nothing” sport with no room for hesitation. Shutting down your opponent depends on your relentless focus and ability to put every fiber of your being into the game. “…If you gathered and joined body and soul and pointed them diving fearlessly….you’d stop the ball”. As the text progresses, the narrator learns that the rules of football can be just as valuable off of the field.

When the narrator and her friends hit the windshield of a passing car with a snowball, she is shocked when the driver emerges from the car and runs after them. From the onset of the chase, the driver is determined to catch the kids. The narrator explains that “he didn’t even close the car door”. Much like an athlete on the football field, he did not hesitate for a moment to begin pursuing the narrator and her friends despite the fact that he was dressed in a suit and tie.

Although the narrator and her friends have the advantage of being on their “turf,” they did not seem to have a strategy to escape quickly and the narrator seems uncertain about her next move: “I paused and considered”. As a result of her hesitation, the driver decides to follow her and Mikey. “We kept running, block after block; we kept improvising…..running a frantic course and choosing it simultaneously”.

The narrator and Mikey are in a panic as they take the driver through the streets and backyards of their neighborhood, but to the narrator’s surprise the driver is able to keep up with little effort. “He chased us silently…..Every time I glanced back, choking for breath, I expected he would have quit”. It is through the resiliency and the determination of the driver to catch the narrator and Mikey that the narrator understands that this adult is applying the rules of football to his pursuit of them. “It was an immense discovery….that this ordinary adult knew what I thought that only children who trained at football knew: that you have to fling yourself at what you’re doing”.

The driver eventually catches the narrator and Mikey. “He had released our jackets, our pursuer, our captor, our hero: he knew we weren’t going anywhere. We all played by the rules”. Playing by the rules resulted in a victory for both the driver and the narrator. The narrator walks away with a valuable life experience: “For the chewing out was redundant…the point was that he chased us passionately without giving up”. The narrator understands that the rules of the game can be applied to life and if you put yourself “wholeheartedly” into whatever it is that you are doing, you will be successful.

Additional Tasks

* “An American Childhood” is set in the 1950’s. During that time, girls had limited athletic opportunities. In 1972, Title IX was signed into law by President Nixon, which made provisions for women to have equal access to sports at high schools and universities. Research Title IX and create a 4-8 slide multi-media presentation using PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi or any other tool of your choice. Your presentation should address the following questions:
  1. What is the historical background of Title IX?
  2. How has Title IX changed athletics at the high school and collegiate level?
  3. Find a recent Title IX case. What was the issue? How was it resolved?
  4. Based on your research, has Title IX provided women with equal access to sports?

Note to Teacher

* A sports motif is used in the text to convey the concept of “playing by the rules.”
* During this lesson, students should be discussing the questions in pairs or small groups followed by whole group discussion. Please review the Speaking and Listening Standards assigned to this lesson for guidance on how students could be engaged in discussion.
* There are a few words that are not Tier II vocabulary, but could be problematic for English Learners and/or other students; therefore, we are listing him here to note that you may want to very briefly (30 seconds or less) review them:
  + intervals, cream puffs
  + turf, hedge
  + Pittsburgh
* The last section of the narrative uses the analogy of crossing the Panama Canal and being in the jungle when summing up her experience and feeling about this chase. Students could be confused about this analogy and how it is being used, it is strongly suggested that after reading, the teacher address through direct instruction the references to the Panama Canal and the jungle, then allow the students in a collaborative activity to discuss the purpose of this analogy and why Dillard uses it.

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**“An American Childhood”**

1. What do we learn about the narrator? Cite evidence from the text to support your response.
2. “Boys welcomed me at baseball, too, for I had through enthusiastic practice, what was weirdly known as a boy’s arm.” What does this statement reveal about Dillard? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
3. When Dillard hits the car with a snowball, a man gets out and begins to chase her. She describes the man as “a thin man, all action.” What does Dillard mean by “all action”? How does the man live up to this description? Cite evidence from the text to support your response.
4. Dillard states, “It was an immense discovery,….that this ordinary adult evidently knew what I thought only children, who trained at football knew: that you have to fling yourself at what you’re doing, you have to point yourself, forget yourself, aim, dive.” What led Annie to this discovery?
5. Dillard describes her pursuer as her “hero.” Why does Dillard consider her pursuer her hero? Cite evidence from the text to support your response.
6. Upon being caught by her pursuer, Dillard states, “I was cherishing my excitement.” What does this statement reveal about the impact that the chase has had on her? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
7. Something that is done perfunctorily is done with little interest or care. Why does Dillard use the word perfunctorily to describe how her pursuer lectures her about hitting his car with a snowball?