Title: from “Ellis Island and I” by Isaac Asimov

Suggested Time: 2 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RI.8.1, RI.8.4, RI.8.5, RI.8.6; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.7, W.8.9; SL.8.1;

L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.4, L.8.5

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

Following your dreams is not without obstacles, but it is worth the work.

Synopsis

In this personal essay by Isaac Asimov, the author relates his journey of becoming a science fiction writer. Asimov explains discovering science fiction through magazines despite his father’s objections. He also recounts publishing his first science fiction story at the age of eighteen and the challenges of being an immigrant.

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** |
| This passage is a from a nonfiction personal essay. What are some clues from the text that help illuminate this to the reader? | This passage is nonfiction, personal essay. The author uses first person (I) when writing. The passage states, “I wanted to read the magazines and my father was unalterably opposed.” I know it is nonfiction/personal essay because author explains his journey of becoming a science fiction writer. |
| How did Asimov’s father feel about his interest in reading science fiction magazines? What evidence from the passage supports this? | Asimov’s father felt that he would be “reading trash and contaminating” his “first-class mind.” This tells the reader of the text that his father did not approve of science fiction magazine as a reading source. |
| What does the word *surreptitious* mean? How do you know? Why do you suppose Asimov chose to use this word rather than a more simple word? | SURREPTITIOUS means sneaky, clever, or sly. Asimov writes “I took *surreptitious* peeks while my father was taking his afternoon nap.” The author may have chosen this word because it emphasizes that he had to be really careful when reading his magazines. This word also has a stronger meaning than if he had used the word sneaky or another synonym. |
| How did Asimov’s father’s feelings about Isaac reading the magazines change? Provide two reasons from the text to explain your answer. | Isaac found one magazine called *Science Wonder Stories.* He “pointed out to [his] father that the stories were about science, they were bound to be educational.”  Also, Isaac’s mother was pregnant and his “father was feeling as though he had a lot more on his mind than questions over whether [he] could read magazines or not. He gave in.” |
| Why did Isaac Asimov decide to begin writing science fiction stories instead of just reading them? | Isaac began his career as a writer in order to fulfill his desire to read science fiction, as a limited amount of stories were made available to him. According to the passage, by the time Isaac was eleven, “I felt that I just could not get enough science fiction from the magazines (there were only three, and they came out just once a month), and it struck me that I might write my own.” |
| Using evidence from the text, create a timeline of events that led to Asimov publishing his first science fiction story. You must include at least three events from the passage. | Student answers will vary, but should include at least three of the following:   * Asimov immigrated to the United States from Russia at the age of three. (From the *Reading for Information* section above text). * Isaac Asimov began reading science fiction magazines. “That started me, at the age of nine, on my career as a science-fiction reader.” * Asimov decides to begin writing science fiction. “By the time I was eleven … it struck me that I might write my own.” * Asimov begins writing science fiction. “I didn’t quite write science fiction at first, but I managed to get to it when I was fifteen.” * Asimov publishes his first science fiction story. “[A]nd by the time I was eighteen I sold a story to one of the magazines and was off and running.” |
| In the last two paragraphs of this passage, Asimov reflects on his journey to become a science fiction writer. What sort of challenges and obstacles did Asimov face in fulfilling his dream? Does he seem regret facing any of these challenges? Use evidence from the text to support your response. | Asimov faced many challenges and obstacles to fulfilling his dream of becoming a science fiction writer. As an immigrant, he was not a native English-language speaker, but desired “to succeed at reading and writing.” Even when his father disagreed with his choice of reading material, Isaac found a way to convince him that reading science fiction was “bound to be educational.” Isaac made the decision to become a writer at a young age (11), and managed to write his first science fiction story at the age of 15. Asimov sold his first science fiction story when he was only 18.  Asimov doesn’t seem to regret facing any of the challenges and obstacles in his path. Rather, he seems to have used those challenges and obstacles as a push to succeed. He states, “Still, as a I think about it, it seems to me I needed something to rise above”, and “Life might have been too easy for me if my ancestors had beat me to the punch and come here on the Mayflower.” |

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** | immigrant | unalterably  opposed  surreptitious  bound  struck  circumstances |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** |  | “on deaf-ears”  contaminating |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt
  + *In the excerpt from “Ellis Island and I”, Isaac Asimov describes his journey to becoming a science fiction writer. In a multi-paragraph explanatory essay, use textual evidence (including direct quotes and page numbers) to identify and describe two character traits that you think Asimov possesses.*
* Teacher Instructions

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 evidence supports the ideas or arguments*** |
| “For a while all my arguments fell on deaf ears, and then I discovered science-fiction magazines, which I took surreptitious peeks at while my father was taking his afternoon nap.” “I pointed out to my father that since the stories were about science, they were bound to be educational. | This statement shows that Asimov was determined. He was willing to read the magazines even if his father disapproved. However, he was able to make a valid point to his father defending his cause |
| “That started me, at the age of nine, on my career as a science fiction reader. By the time I was eleven, I felt that I could not get enough science fiction from magazines.” | Asimov was determined because he read all the science fiction he could get his hands on. |
| “it struck me that I should write my own.” “I managed to get into it by the time I was fifteen, and by the time I was eighteen I sold a story to one of the magazines and was off and running. | Asimov was confident in his ability to write. He started writing at 15 and by the time he was 18 he had already sold a story. |

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. Students compose a rough draft. 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).
3. Students complete final draft.

Sample Answer:

In order to become successful, people must be willing to strive for and work for their dreams. In from “Ellis Island and I”, Isaac Asimov displayed certain character traits that eventually led to his success as a science fiction writer.

One character trait obviously possessed by Asimov was his determination. The text states, “For a while all my arguments fell on deaf ears, and then I discovered science-fiction magazines, which I took surreptitious peeks at while my father was taking his afternoon nap.” This showed he was willing to read the magazines even if his father disapproved. His determination was displayed when he said, “I pointed out to my father that since the stories were about science, they were bound to be educational.” He was able to make a valid point to his father defending his cause.

Asimov was also very confident. He read all the science fiction he could get his hands on and when he ran out of things to read he wrote his own. The text states, “That started me, at the age of nine, on my career as a science fiction reader. By the time I was eleven, I felt that I could not get enough science fiction from magazines. It struck me that I should write my own. I managed to get into it by the time I was fifteen, and by the time I was eighteen I sold a story to one of the magazines and was off and running.” Most teenagers do not view themselves as published authors, but Asimov was determined and confident that he could be successful doing what he loved.

Overall Asimov was determined and confident, two character traits that helped him on his way to becoming an outstanding science fiction writer.

Additional Tasks

* *Read “Hallucination” by Isaac Asimov. After reading the selection, answer the following question: What characteristics do Asimov and Sam Chase from “Hallucination” share? How does each of the young men reach their purpose?*
  + Sample Answer: The young Asimov, like Sam Chase, was inquisitive and confident. Sam realized his purpose by investigating a problem related to neurophysiology. Asimov read all the science fiction he could get his hands on, starting writing his own stories, and at age 18 sold a story to a science fiction magazine.
* *Research Ellis Island and immigration into the United States in the early 1900s, then answer the following questions: Why is the title “Ellis Island and I” appropriate? Write a one-paragraph essay explaining your analysis and include evidence from the text supports your analysis and response.* 
  + Sample Answer: As an immigrant to the United States, Isaac Asimov had to pass through the Ellis Island Processing Center. Many challenges faced immigrants to the United States in the early 1900s. Ellis Island opened in 1892 as a federal immigration station, a purpose it served for more than 60 years (it closed in 1954). Millions of newly arrived immigrants passed through the station; in fact, it has been estimated that close to forty percent of all current U.S. citizens can trace at least one of their ancestors to Ellis Island. These immigrants faced many challenges when they entered into the United States in the early 1900s. Isaac states, “I cannot say how things would have been for me had I not come into the United States as an immigrant.” “Still, as I think about it, it seems to me I needed something to rise above.” He also states, “I’m glad I came here---and I’m glad I had to come here. Life might have been too easy for me if my ancestors had beat me to the punch and had come here on the Mayflower.” Therefore the title, “Ellis Island and I,” is fitting because it highlights his connections with Ellis Island and how it helped shape his life.

Note to Teacher

* Teachers can use the different sentence structures used in the writing to teach complex and compound complex sentences along with the different types of clauses.
* Responses to questions will vary, as each student may select different evidence to support their conclusions.
* A note on evidence sheets and instruction: in order to fulfill SL.8.1, as well as to facilitate collaborative learning, text-dependent questions should be asked, DISCUSSED, and answered using a variety of techniques (whole group, small group, etc.). The evidence sheet is simply for students to track their responses (and can also be used to scaffold proper grammar and format for constructed responses), not as an independent worksheet.