Healing Through Creativity

Writing Educators’ Guide
# Table of Contents

1 Introduction

2 Writing Lesson Plan 1: The Memento Narrative
   5 Day 1: Crafting the Narrative
   6 Day 2: Peer Review
   8 Sample Story: “The Tractor Battery”
   9 *In Loving Memory* by Lauren Yang
   10 “Peace Is Only Real in a Photograph” by Phoebe DeAngelo

13 Art and Writing Project Lesson Plan 2: Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left
   16 Writing Day 1: Written Segment
   18 Writing Day 2: Peer Review
   19 Art Day 1: Evaluating and Creating Initial Artwork
   21 Sample Poem: “Ode to My Goldfish” by Dave Binkard
   22 *Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left* by Victoria Lu

23 Writing Lesson Plan 3: My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project
   26 Daily Lesson Plan Overview
   27 Day 1
   30 Day 2
   32 Day 3
   34 Day 4
   36 Day 5

40 Appendix A
42 Appendix B
44 Lesson Ideas
45 “My Elephant and Me” by Alexa Russell
50 *Suffocation* by Emma Jones
51 *Pulling Tight* by Zoe Chen
52 *Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left* by Victoria Lu
Introduction

*Healing Through Creativity: An Art and Writing Anthology and Discussion Guide,* created by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers with generous support from the New York Life Foundation, is a beautiful anthology of art and writing by young people expressing their experiences of loss and resilience. The discussion guides provided in the book are an excellent support to help people use the art as a springboard for exploring their own feelings of loss. But the art and writing produced by young people also serve as excellent mentor texts—texts to be studied and imitated—for students who would like to learn how to turn their own difficult feelings, whether bereavement, anger, anxiety, or other, into art.

The National Writing Project was proud to be invited as a partner to create English Language Arts lessons to accompany this anthology. In doing so, we hope first to support students in noticing and learning from the techniques that the artists and writers in *Healing Through Creativity* used to make art, and then to scaffold young writers in making their own art—in this case poems and stories—through similar processes.

The lessons are also meant to support teachers to think about how they can approach difficult experiences that their students have faced through everyday instruction and interaction, therefore allowing students to bring various life experiences, including bereavement and other trauma, to school in positive, meaningful, and supported ways.

We want to thank National Writing Project Teacher-Leaders Dave Binkard and Kaitlyn Breidenbach who created these lessons and who have also run a writing camp for young people processing bereavement, for their work to make compassionate learning spaces for all young people, and for their creation of these lessons which might serve as mentor texts to middle and high school English teachers striving to do the same.
The Memento Narrative

WRITING LESSON PLAN

Lesson Summary

The goal of this lesson is for students to develop a narrative about an object of special importance in their lives—a memento.

This project will allow students to explore how to interpret memories over the passage of time, changing situations in their life, and possibly loss. This project will provide students with the opportunity and space to perform introspection at the significance of a memento. They will also learn how to creatively pace a story by spreading out key bits of description, emotional responses, and flashbacks.

This lesson plan will use material from the Healing Through Creativity anthology, a collection of short stories, poetry, artwork, and photography intended for middle-high school age students who have been affected by grief and bereavement. This project expands on the writing prompts provided by this guide, which are more therapeutic in nature. Not every student has experienced significant grief, bereavement, or the loss of a loved one, but it is likely that many students have experienced stress, changing life situations, or loss of a different sort.

This lesson plan is also adaptable to students in grades 8 or higher.

Source Material

In Loving Memory by Lauren Yang
“Peace Is Only Real in a Photograph” by Phoebe DeAngelo
Healing Through Creativity anthology

Written Standards

Grade 8

RL.8.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.8.3: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

RL.8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

RL.8.6: Analyze how differences in points of view of the characters and the audience or reader create such effects as suspense or humor.

Grades 9–10

RL.9–10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
**RL.9–10.3:** Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

**RL.9–10.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

**RL.9–10.5:** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

**Grades 11–12**

**RL.11–12.2:** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

**RL.11–12.3:** Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

**RL.11–12.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

**RL.11–12.5:** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

**RL.11–12.6:** Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

**Learning Objectives**

- To create a personal narrative, creative nonfiction.
- To learn the concept of “pacing” in writing.
- To learn the concept of “foreshadowing” or moving back and forth in time in a story.
- To learn rich description.
- To engage in peer revision of written work.

**Assessments**

**Formative:** Characterization, Conflict, Dialogue, Transitions, Paragraph Structure  
**Summative:** Pacing, Descriptive Writing, Peer Review Participation, Structure, Grammar and Mechanics
**Materials Needed**

- Mentor Text—*Healing Through Creativity*
- Medium for written work TBD by instructor

**Additional Information**

The lesson plan contained for the written segment is two periods of 50 minutes.

This lesson plan may be paired with other creative writing lessons, such as dialogue or character.
The Memento Narrative

DAY 1: CRAFTING THE NARRATIVE

Introduction (5 minutes)

Students will be provided with the image of *In Loving Memory* and be given the following writing prompt:

A memento is defined as “An object kept as a reminder of a person or event.” Do you have a memento from someone who is no longer in your life, like a grandparent who has passed away? Describe this memento.

The Reading and Discussion (20 minutes)

Students will then read “Peace Is Only Real in a Photograph.” This can be individually or as a group. The teacher will prompt the students to take notes as they read for discussion.

• What is the memento in this poem?
• How does the narrator describe this memento?
  • Emphasis should be on the pacing of the description, whether it is given all at once (as an info dump) or bit-by-bit over the course of the poem.
• What are the major changes in tone in this poem?
  • This can lead into a further discussion of “pacing” in a story.
  • This can lead into a further discussion of “foreshadowing” in a story.
• How does the narrator characterize John? Does this characterization change throughout the story?

Presenting the Prompt (5 minutes)

The teacher will then present the prompt for the assignment and answer questions (see attachment at the end of this document).

Writing (Remainder of Time)

Students will begin working on their personal narratives. The teacher could move throughout the classroom to answer individual questions, provide advice. Toward the end of class, the teacher could prompt students to share the work they have done thus far.
The Memento Narrative

DAY 2: PEER REVIEW

Introduction (10 minutes)
Students will be given the story “The Tractor Battery” and be prompted to make changes to it. This is an independent activity that students are expected to complete on their own. This story is about a memento. However, it needs some work. What would you change?
The story is attached to the end of this lesson plan.

Large Group Workshop (10 minutes)
The teacher will describe to the students that they will be revising their short stories in small groups. However, they will need to practice giving quality feedback.
Students will be prompted to share the revisions they made to the story “The Tractor Battery” and explain why they made these revisions. Each student should have the opportunity to speak.
Since the feedback the students provide will vary so greatly, it will be up to the teacher to promote positive feedback and discourage negative feedback.
Some core aspects of quality feedback when it comes to personal creative writing are:
• It should encourage growth in writing ability. (“I like how you used this description...”)
• It should praise what is done well. (“I really understood what you were saying in the second paragraph.”)
• It should offer suggestions for feedback. (“I didn’t quite understand what you meant in the third paragraph. Could you explain it to me? ... What if you reworded it like this...?”)
• It should never be explicitly negative (“This is the worst story I ever read!”)

Small Group Workshop (25 minutes)
Students will break into their small groups to engage in peer review of their stories. Students should read part of their story aloud while their peers listen and make notes. Following the reading would be the period of offering group feedback.
• Special consideration should be made for pacing.

Closing Activity (5 minutes)
Students will share what they learned about their stories and writing from their peers, identify spots for improvement, and what their peers liked about their work.
Creating an Authentic Audience

Students will submit their work to create a packet of the class's writing that will be printed and distributed to each of the students in the class.

An optional idea would be for students to include a picture of the memento with their story.

Assignment Prompt

(This may be adapted as the teacher sees fit)

The Memento Narrative

A Memento is defined as “an object kept as a reminder of a person or event.” Mementos have special value for those who own them and there’s usually a story behind them. For this project, please write a personal narrative about a memento that you have received from someone who may not be in your life anymore, such as a grandparent that has passed away or a distant friend or relative.

Your personal narrative may be arranged however you like, but it should hit the following points:

• **A description of the object.** This should be scattered throughout the story, as opposed to being given all at once. Consider a stuffed teddy bear that is in good quality when it is received, but after 10 years, the colors are faded and the fur is matted down. Does the description of this object change over time?

• **Attention to pacing.** This memento has history. The person who gave it to you gave it to you in the past. You should have a section of the story that explains how you received it and a section that explains it in the present day. For instance, is the memento on a display shelf in your room? Tucked away in a box in your basement?

• **Attention to time.** This story is one that can easily jump from the past to the present and make good use of flashbacks. Consider the following example: You're digging through your closet to find things for a rummage sale when you find an old box. You open it and find the memento. This triggers a flashback into your past, when you received it. After the flashback, you return to the present and think about what it means to you in the present day.

• **Participate in in-class discussion and peer revision.**

Grade 8: This narrative should be between 1.5–2 pages or between 400–500 words in length.

Grades 9–12: This narrative should be between 2–2.5 pages or between 500–600 words in length.
The Tractor Battery

The tractor battery that sits in a box in my basement is small. Less than an inch high, it is black. It is detailed. I do not remember when I received it, but I have always had it. My grandfather made models of antique tractors and farm equipment. Not like the plastic model cars or airplanes you’d find at a craft or hobby store. He would get the original schematics of the antique tractors, make the individual parts, and assemble them. He sold them at toy and collector shows across the country. These were expensive to purchase. Enthusiasts were baffled by the quality he put into his work.

Christmas was always an interesting time. After my mom's mom, my grandma, passed away, my grandfather remarried. By then, Grandpa’s children had grown up and moved entire states away. Our new grandma's family, her children from a former marriage and their children, lived in the same 25-mile area of Grandpa, so he got to know them much better than me, his real grandson. Christmas was one of those times. I remember the other kids looking at my brother and me and basically asking, “Who are you?” as they played together.

It was in the middle of high school that he passed away. My mom was on edge as we drove to the funeral. I feel like I didn’t really get the chance to know my grandpa. There was the distance factor, as well as few opportunities to actually spend time with him. Still, I remember the tractor battery being given to me at some point. Christmas? A birthday? At some point, it materialized in my possession, along with a small box and some bubble wrap to keep it safe. After the funeral, I studied the battery, delicately assembled by his hands. I’m not sure how he did it. I’ve been to his workshop before, but I was too young to be concerned with the assembly of high-quality antique farm equipment and tractor models.

I wish I got to know him better.

The Tractor Battery: Discussion Points for Revising

1. This essay is very much a rough draft at this stage. There are some points that are introduced, but not really developed. Which of these stand out to you? Would you remove them or try to improve them?

2. The grandpa is not actually named in the story. How does this affect the story? Would it be better if there was a name?

3. The second paragraph introduces the idea of Christmas. What purpose does this serve in the story? How could it be developed or improved?

4. The third paragraph has two main points – the funeral and the narrator’s understanding of the tractor battery model. How could this paragraph be developed?

5. The ending is a single sentence. Is it an effective way to end the story?

6. Is the description of the tractor battery enough for you to understand what it is or what it looks like?
In Loving Memory

Lauren Yang, Drawing & Illustration. Grade 11, Dulles High School, Sugar Land, TX. Gold Medal, New York Life Award, 2018.
Peace Is Only Real in a Photograph

Phoebe DeAngelo, Grade 10, Waring School, Beverly, MA.
Gold Key, 2017.

The ocean behind me seems at peace.
It sits still, no waves in sight.
As if all the bad in the world was paused
For just one moment.
On the horizon, a rock wall separates
Sea from clear skies.
A few boats float in the distance
But they’re blurry and they lack importance.
Sand ascends from the water,
Creating a hill of craters in the foreground.

My uncle’s name is John,
But we call him Johnny.
It just always seemed to fit him. He
is the center of the photograph.
His right knee is propped up,
Providing a seat for my sister, Cecily.
I am plopped on his broad shoulders.
His hand grasps my ankle for support.
John and Cecily look forward,
I stayed focused on the hairs of his head.

Uncle Johnny kept us laughing. Burning
mixtapes for my sister and me, Labeling
it “Girls rule, boys drool.”
I still have it.
It’s too scratched to play
With a big stripe of red nail polish.
“Follow Me” by Uncle Kracker
Stays in my favorites on iTunes.

I can hear his laugh echo in my head
Thinking about all the times he got on all fours,
To act as a pony since I always said I wanted one.
The laugh that’s contagious.
That hurts your sides.
That makes your eyes well up. My
aunt was always mad at first.
Muttering something about how he’s going to hurt his knees.
He never cared.
Never stopped.
His smile always bigger
Than anyone I had ever seen.
It pauses time,
Makes everyone forget.
It forces everyone to think about
Only important things.
Happiness, Laughter, Positivity.
He lightens up a room in a way I
always wished I could have.

He fell in love with my aunt Kim at UMass.
A beautiful blonde undergrad student.
She can recall the moment she first saw him. “It
felt like I had known him my whole life.” They
quickly thought about their lives together. A
home,
Children,
A family.

This photo was taken on July 10, 2003.
I was two-and-a-half.
Five hundred and fifty-two days later,
We lost him.

My uncle’s name was Major John Ruocco.
When he was a junior in high school,
He was in a head-on car crash.
The driver was killed.
He decided he wanted to go into the Marines.
To make up for his best friend’s life somehow.
He graduated college wanting to be in the Infantry.
Scoring so high on an entrance exam,
He was convinced to be a pilot instead.
He completed 75 missions in Iraq.
Leaving his two young boys
And beautiful wife
At home.

He came home different,
Changed, unrecognizable.
Awoken with nightmares,
He struggled
To connect with Kim and the boys.
The problem became obvious
When he told his 10-year-old
He forgot to watch the Super Bowl.
Joey handed the phone to Kim.
“Something’s wrong with Daddy.”
She flew across the country to California.  
John had two days before he was deployed.  
She went to the base first.  
“I don’t know what to tell ya,  
He didn’t show up this morning.”  
In panic she went to his hotel.  
She sprinted through the hallway on every floor.  
Hysterically calling his name.  
There was a large man kneeling  
Head to toe in camouflage.  
It wasn’t John.  
This man stood next to an open door.  
Without saying a word  
Kim walked in.  
He had taken his own life.  
He couldn’t handle it.  
He gave up.  
The photograph is loosely taped to my wall,  
Squashed between pictures of my closest friends.  
Everyone who made a difference is up there.  
It blends in with the ones around it  
Yet it’s always the first one I see.  
It’s my favorite one of us.  
Not because it’s the best picture.  
But because it’s the last.  
I see his smile first,  
But then his eyes.  
I see joy, love, compassion.  
Five hundred and fifty-two days.  
Only five hundred and fifty-two days.  
I settle back into the ocean,  
It just looks dark.
Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left

ART AND WRITING PROJECT LESSON PLAN

Lesson Summary
The goal of this lesson is for students to learn more about themselves through self-analysis and introspection in order to produce a work of art and accompanying text. The students will then share this mash-up of art and written work with their classmates and school community.

This project will allow students to explore how they react to stress, changing situations in their life, and loss. This project will provide students with the opportunity and space to perform this introspection, develop the language to accurately portray this type of material, and acquire experience with framing and depicting abstract emotions and ideas through art.

This lesson plan will use material from Healing Through Creativity, a collection of short stories, poetry, artwork, and photography intended for middle-high school age students who have been affected by grief and bereavement. This project expands on the writing prompts provided by this guide, which are more therapeutic in nature. Not every student has experienced significant grief, bereavement, or the loss of a loved one, but it is likely that many students have experienced stress, changing life situations, or loss of a different sort.

This lesson plan is also adaptable—it could serve as a writing lesson plan, an art lesson plan, or one that mashes up both. This lesson plan is also adaptable to students in grades 8 or higher.

Source Material
Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left by Victoria Lu
Healing Through Creativity anthology

Writing Standards

RL.8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

RL.8.6: Analyze how differences in points of view of the characters and the audience or reader create such effects as suspense or humor.

W.9–10.3 C, W.11–12.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

W.9–10.3.D, W.11–12.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Visual Standards

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

• 8th Standard: Demonstrate willingness to experiment, innovate, and take risks to pursue ideas, forms, and meanings that emerge in the process of art-making or designing.

• HS Proficient: Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.
Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work

- **8th Standard**: Explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

- **HS Proficient**: Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

- **HS Accomplished**: Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments.

- **HS Advanced**: Analyze how responses to art develop over time based on knowledge of and experience with art and life.

- **8th Standard**: Compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.

- **HS Proficient**: Analyze how one’s understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

- **HS Advanced**: Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

- **8th Standard**: Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.

- **HS Proficient**: Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

- **HS Advanced**: Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society.

**Learning Objectives**

- To learn and distinguish between “Concrete” and “Abstract” language.
- To learn figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, etc.
- To learn how to incorporate figurative language into their written work.
- To learn how to frame abstract ideas in visual art.
- To engage in peer revision of written work.
- To reflect on the success of using figurative language in their work.

**Assessments**

**Formative**: Poetic Imagery, Figures of Speech,

**Summative**: Concrete vs Abstract, Figurative vs Literal language, Peer Reviews, Grammar and Mechanics, Poetic Structure
### Materials Needed

- Mentor Text – *Healing Through Creativity*
- Medium for written work, TBD by instructor
- Medium and supplies for visual work, TBD by instructor

### Additional Information

The lesson plan contained for the written segment is two periods of 50 minutes. The lesson plan for the art segment is TBD by the instructor, at least one period.
Crafting the Poem

DAY 1: WRITTEN SEGMENT

Introduction (5 minutes)
Students will be provided with the image of Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left and be given the following writing prompt:

Think about a time that you faced a difficult situation and were not sure how to react. How does this image depict that idea?

The Project (5 minutes)
Students will be provided with the assignment prompt for this project, provided at the end of this lesson plan. The teacher will explain the assignment and answer questions.

Discussing the Image (20 minutes)
Students will be split into groups to discuss the image and what they wrote in response to the image for five minutes. During this time, the teacher may move around the classroom to listen with and engage with individual groups.

After that time, students will engage in a class-wide discussion of what interpretations their individual groups came up with regarding the image. This will be the remaining 15 minutes.

Discussion Questions:
• One of the central parts of this image is the hole in middle of the person. Is there a hole in your life?
• The vending machine has some interesting things for sale, such as love and purpose. What meaning does it create to have these things in the vending machine?
• The side of the vending machine reads “How do you feel?” How does this impact the meaning of what is inside the vending machine?
• Society seems to expect a generic response to the question “How do you feel?” or “How are you today?” Have you ever been asked a question like this and have you ever replied that you were “Good” or “Fine” when life was not good or fine for you? Why?

In the course of this discussion, the teacher can introduce the terms “Concrete” and “Abstract” as well as “Figurative” and “Literal” and differentiate between them.

This lesson may also be paired with one exploring figurative language, such as metaphors.

This lesson may also be paired with one exploring poetic formatting, such as rhythm or structure.
**Discussion of Writing (20 minutes)**

The teacher will prompt the students to use the artwork as inspiration to write a poem about a situation in their life when they felt at a loss or encountered a difficult time in their life when they were unsure of how to react.

Write a poem of four stanzas in length in which you were unsure of how to react in a difficult situation. How did you feel? How did you handle it? Try to use more figurative and abstract language than concrete and literal language.
Crafting the Poem

DAY 2: PEER REVIEW

Introduction (5 minutes)
Students will be given the poem “Ode to My Goldfish” and be prompted to make changes to it. This is an independent activity that students are expected to complete on their own.

This poem is about a goldfish that passed away. However, it needs some work. What would you change?

The poem is attached to the end of this lesson plan.

Large Group Workshop (10 minutes)
The teacher will describe to the students that they will be revising their poems in small groups. However, they will need to practice giving quality feedback.

Students will be prompted to share the revisions they made to the poem “Ode to My Goldfish” and explain why they made these revisions. Each student should have the opportunity to speak.

Since the feedback the students provide will vary so greatly, it will be up to the teacher to promote positive feedback and discourage negative feedback.

Some core aspects of quality feedback when it comes to personal creative writing are:

• It should encourage growth in writing ability. (“I like how you used this metaphor...”)

• It should praise what is done well. (“I really understood what you were saying in the second stanza. I could relate to it!”)

• It should offer suggestions for feedback. (“I didn’t quite understand the second line of the third stanza. Could you explain it to me? ... What if you reworded it like this...?”)

• It should never be explicitly negative (“This is the worst poem I ever read!”)

Small Group Workshop (30 minutes)
Students will break into their small groups to engage in peer review of their poems. Students should read their poem aloud while their peers listen and make notes. Following the reading would be the period of offering group feedback.

Closing Activity (5 minutes)
Students will share what they learned about their poems and writing from their peers, identify spots for improvement, and what their peers liked about their work.
Art Segment

DAY 1: EVALUATION AND INITIAL ARTWORK

Introduction (5 minutes)
Students will be provided with the image of Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left and be given the following prompt:
This image shows someone who has lost a significant part of themselves. How does the artist convey this sense of loss?
Students will take notes of what stands out to them.

Discussion (10 minutes)
Students will discuss in large groups how the image creates a sense of loss. Students will likely have multiple ideas.
Some core points of discussion:
• What is the significance of the way this person is standing, facing away from the viewer?
• Look at the names of the products in the vending machine. How does this correspond to a sense of loss?
• What is the significance of the hole in the person’s chest/back?
• What does the text on the side of the vending machine “How do you Feel?” signify?
• The idea of purchasing these emotions from a vending machine refers to commodification to these emotions. How is this significant?

Generating Art (35 minutes)
Students will then begin to draft their own work of art to go along with the poem they have previously written or, if this lesson is being used exclusively as an art project, should take notes of how they have felt in similar circumstances. This will help provide the student with a sense of direction.
Examples of directions to go:
• Masks or shields
• An exterior/interior cutaway (such as one would see in architecture)
• A view “inside” one’s head
• An image in what would be a person’s silhouette

**This lesson may be repeated until the artwork has been satisfactorily completed. The teacher may choose to bring in additional examples of artwork that conveys a similar sense of loss, grief, or bereavement, such as others found in the Healing Through Creativity anthology.**

The final portion of this assignment is to blend the two together. The student may choose to copy the final draft of their poem around the image, attach a printed version through some means, or affix the poem to the image in some other format.
Creating an Authentic Audience

Students will be able to display their poems in the classroom, in a school hallway, or posted in an art gallery open to friends and family.

Alternatively, students could use an extension exercise to create and publish a booklet of class poetry, of which each student would receive a copy.

Assignment Prompt
(This may be adapted as the teacher sees fit)

Personal Poem
Your goal for this project is to learn more about yourself through introspection and self-reflection.

To do this, you will write a poem of no less than four stanzas based on notes that you take as the class discusses the image *Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left* by Victoria Lu.

The prompt for the poem is as follows: Write a poem of four stanzas in length in which you were unsure of how to react in a difficult situation. How did you feel? How you handle it? Try to use more figurative and abstract language than concrete and literal language.

You should hit the following points:

• **Use figurative and abstract language.** The use of figurative and abstract language (such as metaphors) should outnumber the use of literal and concrete language.

• **Attention to formatting.** Are the stanzas of the same length? Line number? Do they follow a particular poetic rhythm or scheme?

• **Attention to content.** Does the content of the poem match the prompt as listed above?

• **Participate in in-class discussion and peer revision.**

Art Project
Your goal for the art project is to create a self-portrait that is based on your poem, one that demonstrates some sort of internal conflict with how to handle a difficult situation.

• **Attention to formatting.** Will you be able to adhere the stanzas to the self-portrait in some way?

• **Effort.** Did you attempt to create a quality self-portrait to the best of your ability?

• **Use of abstract or figurative imagery.** Did your self-portrait make use of abstract or figurative imagery?

Ideas for abstract or figurative imagery:

• Masks or Shields
• An exterior/interior cutaway (like you would see in an architecture drawing of a building)
• A view “inside” someone’s head
• An image inside what would normally be someone’s silhouette or shadow
SAMPLE POEM:

Ode to My Goldfish
By Dave Binkard

Oh Goldfish,
How you swam swam swam
in circles
matches the way
you were flushed flushed flushed
in circles.
My heart beats for you,
pumping little fish of red blood cells
through my aorta, veins, and capillaries,
from my heart to my eyes,
where tears fall heavy, free, and many
into your vacant bowl
splashing and rippling
in your absence.

Ode to My Goldfish: Discussion Points for Revising

1. What lines, if any, could be cut entirely from the poem? Why do you choose these lines?
2. Do any ideas need to be stated differently? If so, which ones? Why?
3. The author implies the way the goldfish’s remains are disposed of on line 5. Is this necessary?
4. In your group, please identify all instances of figurative or abstract language. Are these effective?
5. What would you add to this poem?
Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left

Lesson Summary

This My Elephant and Me mini-unit was created as a series of lessons in which students go from learning what a metaphor is to analyzing the success of using an extended metaphor in their own writing. There is also the option for the mini-unit to be interdisciplinary across the English Language Arts and Visual Arts Classrooms in which students would create a visual representation of an extended metaphor that they use in their writing piece. In combination with English and Visual Arts, students would then upload both their writing and art components, along with an artist’s statement explaining and reflecting on their work, to an online gallery space to be viewed by other students.

The purpose of this mini-unit is to build upon the writing prompts provided in the Healing Through Creativity anthology for the text “My Elephant and Me.” This mentor text and the subsequent writing prompts are designed to give students an opportunity to explore an event or situation in their personal lives that they haven’t had the language, space, or opportunity to share, especially centering topics around grief and loss. However, because not all students have experienced a loss—and furthermore, not all students may want to share about loss even if they have experienced it—this mini-unit expands upon the writing prompts provided in the Healing Through Creativity anthology to move away from just loss and grief, to also consider any event when students were not fully able to express themselves.

Although this mini-unit was written with the final assessment of the My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery project in mind, the individual My Elephant and Me lesson plan from Day 2 can also be used as a standalone lesson to incorporate into a short story or narrative writing unit with a focus on how metaphors are used in texts.

See Visual Arts lesson materials in Appendix B.

Students will use the narrative story “My Elephant and Me” as a mentor text to learn about metaphors and analyze how an extended metaphor is developed throughout the course of a work. Students will then use the concept of “the elephant in the room” to write their own piece that uses an extended metaphor and responds to one of the following prompts:

- Write about a situation or event in your own life when you did not tell others what was happening.
- Write about a time when words were bubbling inside, but for some reason you weren’t quite able to let them spill out.
- Write about a topic that seems to be off-limits at school (or at home, or with your family or friends, or at your place of worship), but you think is important to be discussed.
Source Material

Primary Text: “My Elephant and Me” by Alexa Russell, in Healing Through Creativity

Supplementary Text: “When in Love” by Marcus Jackson
“When Out of Love” by Marcus Jackson
My Hair Is a Garden by Cozbi A. Cabera

Written Standards

ELA Common Core Standards

RL.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text.

RL.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.5: With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

W.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products.

L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

NCTE/IRA Standards for ELA

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Learning Objectives

• Identify metaphors and analyze the purpose of metaphors within texts
• Create metaphors independently and in small groups
• Incorporate extended metaphors in their writing
• Reflect on the success of using extended metaphors in their writing
Assessments

Formative: Exit Tickets, Small Group and Whole Class Discussion, One-on-One Conferencing
Summative: The My Elephant and Me Gallery Project: writing component and artist's statement (See Appendix A)

Materials Needed

Physical Materials:
• My Hair Is a Garden by Cozbi A. Cabera
• Student Notebooks
• Laptops (optional)

Digital Materials:
• Healing Through Creativity
• My Elephant and Me Gallery Project Sheet

Additional Information

The following lesson plans are created for 50-minute class periods. However, the lesson sequences could be easily adapted to accommodate for both shorter class periods as well as longer, blocked class periods.

Five lesson plans are laid out to launch the mini-unit. However, the teacher may want to provide additional days for students to revise and publish their work.

The following lesson plans were created to be adapted across grades 6–12.
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

DAILY LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

**Day One**

Students will learn the definition of metaphor and will determine the purpose of using metaphors. Students will identify metaphors in a poem and then create metaphors of their own using a template. This lesson is adapted from a demonstration from Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher in their YouTube video.

Objectives:
- Students will be able to define metaphor.
- Students will be able to identify metaphors in poems.
- Students will be able to create metaphors.

**Day Two**

Students will read and discuss the short story “My Elephant and Me” from the *Healing through Creativity* anthology.

Objectives:
- Students will be able to define extended metaphor.
- Students will be able to analyze how extended metaphors are used in a short story.

**Day Three**

Students will be introduced to the My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project. Students will begin brainstorming topics to write about for the project.

Objective:
- Students will be able to brainstorm and select a writing topic in response to the prompt.

**Day Four**

Students will create metaphors to use in their writing piece for the My Elephant and Me Project.

Objective:
- Students will be able to create metaphors in a piece of writing.

**Day Five**

Students will analyze the word choices used in a children’s book to support an extended metaphor. Students will revise their piece of writing to include words that align with or support their extended metaphor.

Objectives:
- Students will be able to explain how extended metaphors are developed throughout a piece of work.
- Students will utilize word choice to create an extended metaphor in their writing.
- Students will analyze the success of their revisions.
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

DAY 1

Introduction Activity (10 minutes)
Before class begins, the teacher will write the below writing prompt on the front board. As students enter the class, they will be instructed to write in response to the prompt in their writer's notebooks.

Writing Prompt: Pick an emotion. Using your own words describe what that emotion is and what it feels like.

Think/Pair/Share: Students will share what they wrote with a pair or a small group. Then the teacher will ask a few pairs/groups to share with the class.

Purpose: The teacher will explain that sometimes it is difficult to discuss abstract concepts, like emotions, without using figurative (non-literal) language. One literary device that can be used to describe abstract concepts is a metaphor.

Students may write in notebooks, on a piece of scratch paper, or may respond to a Google form depending on what routines and procedures students are familiar with.

Defining Metaphors (5 minutes)
Teachers will ask students what a metaphor is and then will share the following definition on the board:

Metaphor: a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract; a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable

Teacher will explain that sometimes it is difficult to discuss abstract or intangible concepts or ideas. So, often what authors and writers will use figurative language and especially metaphors to make a comparison so that the reader can identify with exactly what emotion, concept, or idea the author is trying to get across.

Metaphors help readers to “see an old thing in a new and vivid way” (Stephen King, On Writing).

Teacher will then define concrete vs. abstract

Concrete: existing in a physical form; something you can see or touch
Abstract: something you cannot touch or see; concepts or ideas

Purpose of this activity: In “My Elephant and Me” the author used the idea of an elephant as a metaphor to represent her grief. For the writing project, students will be doing something similar. They will be using an extended metaphor to explore a seemingly taboo, or maybe just an uncomfortable, topic, event, or situation. Therefore, students need to understand what metaphors are and how to create them.
Finding and Creating Metaphors (15 minutes)

This lesson sequence and materials are adapted from a demonstration from Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher in their YouTube video. Link: youtu.be/LjVCfHbK6Ro

Finding Metaphors in a Sample Poem: Teacher will pass out or pull up sample poems (see Poem Recommendations from Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher), and read the poems to the class. Students should read with the purpose of identifying concrete and abstract objects that the author used.

After reading, the teacher will ask students to share what line stood out to them or was their favorite. As the students share, the teacher will ask them what is concrete and abstract in the line they are sharing. The teacher should record student answers on the whiteboard.

Questions:
• What effect does that line have on the reader?
• What does it make you think of?
• What emotions are attached to it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Concrete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>desolate/futile</td>
<td>Rowboat at the center of the desert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innocent/naive</td>
<td>You’re a piece of luminous fruit Yet to be bruised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creating Metaphors: Teacher will ask students to try and create their own metaphors by creating another chart and will ask students to share some of the emotions they identified during the introduction activity. Teacher will record these answers on the board under the abstract section. Then the teacher will ask students to name random concrete items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Concrete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>Flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the class has created a list of concrete and abstract items, the teacher will write the following on the board:

___________ is ___________ because _______________

Teacher will model completing the blanks by filling them in with an abstract item, then a concrete item, and then creating an explanation.

Example: Anxiety is a cloud because it is always taking new shapes and forms: My mind swirls, a cloud; ever growing, changing, expanding

Small Group Work (10 minutes)

Students will work in small groups or pairs to come up with their own examples. A representative from the group will write their example on the white board.
Independent Writing (5 minutes)

Students will revisit the emotion they explained in the introduction activity and will revise their explanation to include a metaphor or two.

Closing Activity (5 minutes)

Exit Ticket:
Students will respond to the following prompt:

What is a metaphor? What is the purpose of using metaphors?

Collection Method:
- Google Form/Survey
- Sticky Note
- Scratch Paper
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

DAY 2

**Introduction Activity (5 minutes)**

Before class begins, the teacher will write the below writing prompt on the front board. As students enter the class, they will be instructed to write in response to the prompt in their writer's notebooks.

**Writing Prompt:** Create a metaphor with or about an elephant.

**Think/Pair/Share:** Students will share what they wrote with a pair or a small group. Then the teacher will ask a few pairs/groups to share with the class.

**Purpose:** Teacher will explain that today students will be reading a mentor text which includes an extended metaphor of an elephant.

**Extended Metaphor:** a metaphor that is developed throughout a work.

Students may write in notebooks, on a piece of scratch paper, or may respond to a Google form depending on what routines and procedures students are familiar with.

**Small Group Work (5 minutes)**

Pre-Reading Instruction:

The teacher will ask the students to discuss in small groups:

- What associations do you have with elephants? In other words, what do elephants or the word elephant make you think of?
- What do you think an elephant could symbolize or represent in a story?

After students have discussed, the small groups will be asked to report the answers to the large group. The teacher should write—or have students write—their responses on the board so that the elephant associations and symbolisms are visible to students as they begin reading.

**Reading “My Elephant and Me” (20 minutes)**

The teacher will pass out or have students access copies of “My Elephant and Me” from the *Healing Through Creativity* anthology.

The teacher will ask students to annotate—or take note of the following while they read:

- The ways in which the elephant is characterized
- Things that the elephant does
- What the elephant represents

**Reading:** The teacher will read “My Elephant and Me” out loud to the class while students follow along and annotate. For younger grades, it may be necessary to take a few minutes to explain what annotating is and the purpose for taking annotations.
**Annotating:** adding notes or comments to a text; interacting with a text while you are reading

**Purpose:** provides a record of your thinking; helps you to make meaning of a text while you are reading; helps you to identify moves an author makes in their writing

Other reading options depending on grade level and ability of students:
- Have students read the text independently, in class or as homework
- Have students read the text in a small group or with a partner

**Small Group Work (10 minutes)**

In small groups students will be asked to respond to the following prompts:
- Summarize “My Elephant and Me.”
- What is the elephant a metaphor for? What does the elephant represent?
- What are the ways in which the elephant is characterized? What are things that the elephant does?
- How does the phrase “elephant in the room” relate to this story? Have you ever had a similar experience?

The teacher will ask each group to pick a spokesperson to summarize what their group discussed and share it with the whole group.

**Discussion Strategies:**
It may be beneficial to give students a handout with the discussion prompts and have students record their answers as they discuss.

**Personal Thoughts on the Text:**
I really like this story because the author uses an extended metaphor, of comparing her grief to an elephant, and she uses this metaphor to frame the story. She opens and closes with the haunting elephant and allows the elephant to stomp its way throughout every step of the way while she shares her story. My association with an elephant is the phrase “the elephant in the room.” It is something everyone can see, but no one wants to acknowledge.

**Closing Activity (5 minutes)**

Exit Ticket:
Students will individually write in response to the following prompt:

What is the difference between an extended metaphor and a metaphor? Use an example from the story “My Elephant and Me” in your response.

**Collection Method:**
- Google Form/Survey
- Sticky Note
- Scratch Paper
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

DAY 3

Introduction Activity (10 minutes)

Before class begins, the teacher will write the below writing prompt on the front board. As students enter the class, they will be instructed to write in response to the prompt in their writer's notebooks.

Writing Prompt: Write a list of topics that are important to you, but that you don’t think are discussed enough in certain spaces (example: schools, homes, places of worship).

Think/Pair/Share: Students will share what they wrote with a pair or a small group. Then the teacher will ask a few pairs/groups to share with the class.

Purpose: This relates to one of the prompts for the My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project. Students may write in notebooks, on a piece of scratch paper, or may respond to a Google form depending on what routines and procedures students are familiar with.

Introducing My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project (10 minutes)

The teacher will pass out or pull up the My Elephant and Me Gallery Project sheet and will read through it with students.

Teacher will explain that students will have a choice regarding what prompt they select and what medium they write in. The main factor is that students use an extended metaphor in their writing. Link to Assignment*: bit.ly/3bNyCjj

* See Appendix A

Modeling (5 minutes)

The teacher will write each of the prompts on the board and will talk through events or situations they could write about in response to the prompts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation or event in your own life when you did not tell others what was happening</th>
<th>A time when words were bubbling inside, but for some reason you weren’t quite able to let them spill out</th>
<th>Topic that seems to be off limits . . . but you think is important to be discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When family was moving</td>
<td>When a family member made a racist comment, I wanted to say something, but didn’t</td>
<td>Body image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my mom was diagnosed with cancer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Privilege</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher will talk through each of the choices, some extended metaphors they could use, and the medium they would want to write in.

For younger grades, it may be beneficial to limit students to writing only a personal narrative as they may need more structure and guidance during the writing process. Older students may appreciate having the choice of artistic expression.
**Brainstorming (10 minutes)**

Students will brainstorm potential events, topics, or situations that they could write about for the My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project. Students can work independently or in a small group to brainstorm ideas.

**Conferencing:**
Teacher should circulate the room while students are working independently to confer with students one-on-one. Some students may need additional support brainstorming ideas to write about.

It may be useful to give students a chart, as seen above, with each of the prompts to fill out while they are brainstorming.

**Independent Writing (5 minutes)**

Students will select one of the topics from their brainstorm list and will begin free writing in response to the topic for 15 minutes. Students will write without stopping for the entire 15 minutes.

If students have never heard the term free write, it may be beneficial to explain to students that free writing is a time to get your ideas down on paper without worrying about grammar, organization, making mistakes, or sounding silly. It’s just a brain dump of everything you can think of in relation to the topic.

**Closing Activity (5 minutes)**

Exit Ticket:
Students will individually write in response to the following prompt:

What questions do you have about the project in general or the writing piece in particular?
What concerns do you have?

**Collection Method:**
- Google Form/Survey
- Sticky Note
- Scratch Paper
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

DAY 4

Introduction Activity (5 minutes)

Before class begins, the teacher will write the below writing prompt on the front board. As students enter the class, they will be instructed to write in response to the prompt in their writer’s notebooks.

Writing Prompt: What are some abstract concepts you wrote about in your free write yesterday?

Think/Pair/Share: Students will share what they wrote with a pair or a small group. Then the teacher will ask a few pairs/groups to share with the class.

Purpose: Students will be creating metaphor tables in the lesson today to help them determine an extended metaphor to use in their writing.

Students may write in notebooks, on a piece of scratch paper, or may respond to a Google form depending on what routines and procedures students are familiar with.

Modeling (5 minutes)

The teacher will share which writing prompt they chose from the previous day. The teacher will model selecting abstract concepts found within their free writing. The teacher will create a metaphor table and will determine an extended metaphor to use. The teacher will ask students to give them feedback on their metaphor.

Topic: Teacher writes example topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Concrete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creating Metaphors (10 minutes)

Independent Work:
Students will complete metaphor tables of abstract and concrete items, and then will decide on a few different extended metaphors they could use.

Small Group Share:
Students will share their work in small groups, and their group members will give them feedback.
Independent Writing (25 minutes)

Students will begin writing.

Writing Prompt: Write a personal narrative, piece of poetry, or song which explores one of the following prompts and uses an extended metaphor:

• Write about a situation or event in your own life when you did not tell others what was happening.
• Write about a time when words were bubbling inside, but for some reason you weren’t quite able to let them spill out.
• Write about a topic that seems to be off limits at school (or at home, or with your family or friends, or at your place of worship), but you think is important to be discussed.

Conferencing:
Teacher should circulate the room while students are working independently to confer with students one-on-one.

Closing Activity (5 minutes)

Exit Ticket: Students will individually write in response to the following prompt:

Select all that apply regarding the My Elephant and Me Writing Component

• I need more help understanding what a metaphor is
• I need more help brainstorming topics to write about
• I need more help creating metaphors for my topic
• I need more help planning out how to begin writing
• I am good to continue writing

Collection Method:
• Google Form/Survey
• Sticky Note
• Scratch Paper
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

DAY 5

Introduction Activity (10 minutes)

Before class begins, the teacher will write the below writing prompt on the front board. As students enter the class, they will be instructed to write in response to the prompt in their writer's notebooks.

Writing Prompt: Write your metaphor at the top of your page. Now think of all the words that you can that are associated with your metaphor. Think of nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Think/Pair/Share: Students will share what they wrote with a pair or a small group. Then the teacher will ask a few pairs/groups to share with the class.

Purpose: Today's students will work on developing their metaphor into an extended metaphor using specific word choice.

Students may write in notebooks, on a piece of scratch paper, or may respond to a Google form depending on what routines and procedures students are familiar with.

Understanding Extended Metaphor (5 minutes)

Teacher will ask students to remind them what the difference is between a metaphor and an extended metaphor. Teacher will draw attention to the fact that an extended metaphor is developed throughout a work.

Teacher will ask students: how is an extended metaphor developed throughout the course of a work? What exactly does that mean? How would one go about doing that? How was the extended metaphor developed throughout “My Elephant and Me”?

Reading (10 minutes)

Teacher will pull out the children's book My Hair Is a Garden by Cozbi A. Cabrera to read to students.

Teacher will ask: what can you tell me about this title? What is this title?

Answer: a metaphor

Teacher will explain that throughout the book the author uses an extended metaphor of the main character’s hair being a garden. Teacher will ask students to pay attention to how the author does this by focusing on the words, descriptions, and images the author uses throughout the story. Students should write these words down while the teacher reads the story aloud.

Once the teacher is finished reading, they will ask the students to share what they wrote down. Teacher will write students’ answers down on the board.
Teacher will ask: How did the author create an extended metaphor of hair being like a garden throughout the course of this work?

Answer: through word choice (verbs, adjectives, nouns), content, and comparisons.

Word Choice Examples from *My Hair Is a Garden*:

- Vines
- Hair is a nest
- Comb like a garden rake
- Cropped
- Drowning
- Alive
- The little tree that was beaten down
- Succulents vs. maples
- Cared for
- Nutrients
- Seeds plants
- Yield weed

**Modeling (5 minutes)**

The teacher will share what their metaphor is for their writing piece and then write a sentence from their writing piece on the board.

Teacher will ask students: what words could I add or switch out to help further develop my extended metaphor?

Students will respond to help the teacher revise their writing.

**Independent Writing (5 minutes)**

Students will revise their piece of writing to see what words they could switch out or comparisons and images they could add to help develop their extended metaphor throughout their piece of work.

Students will continue working on their piece of writing

Conferencing: Teacher should circulate the room while students are working independently to confer with students one-on-one.

**Closing Activity (5 minutes)**

Students will individually write in response to the following prompt:

How did you revise your writing piece today to further align with your extended metaphor?

Collection Method:
- Google Form/Survey
- Sticky Note
- Scratch Paper
**Extension Activities**

Depending on the grade level and ability of your students, it will be necessary to include additional supports and activities to help students create, revise, and publish their narrative essays. Some additional activities are as follows:

**Planning and Writing Activities**

- Show students additional models of songs, poems, and stories which use metaphors (see additional Resources/Mentor Texts)
- Discuss clichés and how to avoid them when writing original metaphors
- Have students create a storyboard to help them visualize and consider the organization of their writing

**Revision Activities**

- Peer Revision
- Revision Stations
- One-on-One conferencing with the teacher

**Publishing Activities**

We recommend having students publish their writing and art pieces to an online gallery using Padlet, however you may use whatever online or physical platform that works best for your classroom and your students. After students publish their work, they should view and respond to their peers’ work to help create an authentic audience.

**Some additional platforms besides Padlet to consider are:**

- **Bulletin Board Display:** create a physical gallery in which students display their art and writing pieces on a bulletin board or along a wall. Students will be in control of the best alignment of their art and writing pieces along with a title. Students can have the option of writing out their Artist’s Statement explaining and reflecting on their work, or they could print off a QR code which links the viewers to a video or audio of them explaining and reflecting on their work.
- **FlipGrid:** have students create a FlipGrid video which will serve as their Artist’s Statement, in which they explain and reflect on their work. Students can also include a picture of their artwork on their screen and then can leave a link to their writing piece in the comment section of their video posting.
- **Blog or Personal Website:** if students already use blogs or personal websites within your classroom, they could create a post dedicated to showcasing their writing and art pieces, along with a reflection and explanation which would serve as their artist’s statement.
- **Class Social Media Account:** if you have a class social media account—a Facebook or Instagram page—each student could create a post in which they share a photo of their art and writing piece. In the caption or comment section, students can include the title of their project along with an explanation and reflection of their work which will serve as the artist’s statement.
Additional Resources/Mentor Texts

It may be helpful to give students additional mentor texts to explore metaphors.

**Songs:**
- “I’ll Make a Man Out of You” from *Mulan*
- “Take Me to Church” by Hozier
- “My Shot,” “Right Hand Man,” or “Hurricane” from *Hamilton*
- “DNA” by Kendrick Lamar

**Poems:**
- “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou
- “Coal” by Audre Lorde
- “Brown Girl Manifesto (Too)” by Marilyn Chin

**Short Stories/Children’s Books:**
- *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker
- *Black Is a Rainbow Color* by Angela Joy
- *Love* by Matt de la Peña
- *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson

**Artwork:**
From the *Healing Through Creativity* anthology:
- *Suffocation*
- *Pulling Tight*
- *Sometimes I Feel Like There Is Nothing Left*
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project

APPENDIX A

Lesson Summary
This mash-up project between English Language Arts and Visual Arts will be an opportunity to explore that “thing” in your life that hovers about, follows you around, but which you’ve never quite had the language, space, or opportunity to share. What is your elephant in the room?

English Language Arts Component
Write a personal narrative, piece of poetry, or song that explores one of the following prompts and uses an extended metaphor:

• Write about a situation or event in your own life when you did not tell others what was happening.
• Write about a time when words were bubbling inside, but for some reason you weren’t quite able to let them spill out.
• Write about a topic that seems to be off limits at school (or at home, or with your family or friends, or at your place of worship), but you think is important to be discussed.

Visual Arts Component
Create a visual representation of the extended metaphor you use in your piece of writing.

Artist’s Statement
Explain the creative choices you made regarding your art and writing pieces.

Digital Gallery
Add your writing piece and a digital, scanned version of your visual art piece to our digital gallery on Padlet along with a title for your project and an artist’s statement explaining and reflecting on your work as a whole.

Project Requirements Checklist:

Writing Piece
• I wrote a personal narrative, piece of poetry, or a song.
• My piece of writing responds to and/or explores the prompt.
• My piece of writing demonstrates that I put in thorough time and effort.
• My piece of writing demonstrates the best of my writing abilities.
• My piece of writing includes a well-developed extended metaphor.

Art Piece
• TBD by the art instructor
**Artist’s Statement**

Note: You can either write out your artist’s statement or you can give a verbal statement by creating a short audio clip or video.

- I explain my creative choices regarding my writing and art pieces.
- I explain how I used metaphors and/or extended metaphors in my writing.
- I reflect on what I did well regarding my writing and art pieces.
- I reflect on what I struggled with or what I would have liked to improve on regarding my writing and art pieces.

**Digital Gallery**

- I uploaded my piece of writing.
- I uploaded an image of my art piece.
- I included a title for my writing and art piece.
- I included an artist’s statement that both explains and reflects upon my writing and art pieces.
Lesson Summary

Students will create a piece of visual art that is inspired by their piece of writing for the My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project and is reflective of a metaphor used throughout their writing.

Source Material

**Primary Text:**
TBD by art teacher

**Supplementary Text:**
From the *Healing Through Creativity* anthology
- *Suffocation*
- *Pulling Tight*
- *Sometimes I Feel Like There Is Nothing Left*

Visual Standards

**Visual Arts Common Core Standards**

**Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

**Anchor Standard 4:** Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Learning Objectives

- Generate ideas from a piece of writing.
- Create a piece of art which represents a metaphor.
- Reflect on the success of their art piece.

Assessments

**Summative:** The My Elephant and Me Gallery Project: art component and artist’s statement (See Appendix A)

Materials Needed

**Physical Materials:**
- Mentor Text—*Healing Through Creativity*
- Medium for Written work TBD by instructor
- Medium and Supplies for visual work TBD by instructor
**Digital Materials:**
- Mentor Text—*Healing Through Creativity*
- My Elephant and Me Gallery Project Sheet

**Additional Information**
Time Allotment: TBD by art teacher
Unit Length: TBD by art teacher

The following lesson plans were created to be adapted across grades 6–12.
My Elephant and Me Digital Gallery Project
LESSON IDEAS

Looking at Models
Have students look at the artwork in the Healing Through Creativity anthology to see how metaphors can be represented in art.
• Suffocation
• Pulling Tight
• Sometimes I Feel Like There Is Nothing Left

Generating Ideas
Have students write their metaphor in the middle of a sheet of paper.
Optional: Have students also write the words, phrases, and images they use to develop their metaphor throughout their piece of writing.
Have students quick sketch/brainstorm everything they associate with the metaphor.
Have students meet in small groups and share their metaphor. The rest of the group members will share what associations they have with the objects/concepts used in the metaphor.
My Elephant and Me

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR


I am haunted by an elephant. He hovers over my shoulder wherever I go. He follows me in the school hallways, sneaking along without anyone batting an eye. How can one hide a two-ton animal in plain sight? You simply can’t. The effects of such a presence leak into every aspect of your life. Even invisible ghosts have visible consequences.

It was the middle of June, and we were gathered together in the ultrasound room. After everything that had happened the previous winter, we needed some good news. Miscarriage has a way of breaking even the strongest heart, but this moment would be our redemption. The nurse jiggled my mother’s stomach, trying to get a better view. We had told her how much we wanted a boy, and she was anxious to find out if she would get to make our dreams a reality. We laughed to release the tension in the room, held each other’s hands in anticipation.

“Well, Momma, it looks like your wish came true!”

Our joy filled the sterile room, rang loud down the hall and settled around us. My sisters giggled and jumped. My dad shed a few tears. I was there behind the camera, grinning from ear to ear. Everything God had told me that night the first baby passed away was finally happening. He had promised me this brother, and he was following through.

The nurse brought out a basket filled to the brim with stuffed animals. One would have the honor of holding my brother’s heartbeat in its chest.

“We’ll let Dad decide since it’s a boy!”

“I think we should get the elephant because they both have a trunk.”

That’s the conversation that changed my life. A single, slightly euphemistic statement that brought my phantom elephant to life. I didn’t know it at the time, but soon every time I saw one of those massive creatures, my heart would swell with love and grief.

July came with more doctor visits, just-in-case checkups and ultrasounds. When we went as a family, my sisters and I laughed in the back of the room, guessing at what formless blob on the screen was our brother-to-be. We joked about how the baby sat cross-legged like a true Indian, and how his little hands covered his face. We left that day blissfully unaware of the error in my brother’s DNA, completely ignorant to the malformation in his organs.

It wasn’t until a couple of days later that the doctor called my mom to tell her about trisomy 13 and the chances of her son’s survival. The practically impossible had happened to him. His thirteenth chromosome had been repeated by some mistake in his DNA replication. He was growing and growing with the wrong instructions from his cells. The wrong pattern was being used, creating a body that wasn’t meant to live.

“You’d be lucky to have a couple of minutes with him.”

My parents brought us into the living room one day soon after that. They told us to sit on the couch. They needed to talk to us about the baby. We sat down in a row, wondering what was going on.

“The doctor said that he isn’t expected to live.”

Then it was our turn to hear about trisomy 13. We cried together as a family, something that became a regular activity in the coming months. I was broken and lost. How could this be the plan God had for us?
School started that August, life’s lame attempt at normalcy. It was my ninth-grade year, the last year of junior high in my town. I was supposed to be on top of the world. Of course, I wasn’t. I was too afraid to tell my friends I had a dying brother at home. So I lived my freshman year alone. I went through the motions of school and came home to despair. Some days my mom would be so down that none of the normal motherly chores would be done. She’d just be sitting around the house crying, almost always crying. She had begun grieving her baby the moment the diagnosis reached her ears. The rest of us seemed so far behind in the process.

My mother wasn’t like me. Her friends knew what she was going through. Soon, people sent elephants of their own. My elephant wasn’t the only one in the room anymore. Compassion drove our friends to great lengths to support us. They sent us gifts from across the country, found trinkets to show their love. Their elephants brought mine some company, but it wasn’t the same as lonely, my elephant and me.

Months passed, and my loneliness consumed me. I cried silently most mornings, trying not to draw attention to my grief while desperately wishing for someone to notice. I walked to class with my elephant in tow, two tons of hurt weighing down on my soul. I wore elephant bracelets on my wrist as a physical acknowledgment of my sorrow. One day, out of nowhere, a friend asked what they were for. I smiled, so grateful for that tiny spark of hope.

“They’re for my brother. He has trisomy 13, and they don’t think he’ll live.”

“Oh, I think I’ll get one too.”

One simple sentence, and suddenly a pet elephant didn’t seem like such a difficult thing to have. December was fast approaching, bringing my brother’s due date with it. But it was only November, and I told myself I still had time with him. My elephant was getting antsy; breaking down became more common. It was the 10th when my dad picked me up from school. I got in the car and instantly felt the thick gloom in the air. He turned to me with fear and sadness in his eyes.

“It’s time.”

We got home and told my sisters that Mom was being induced. We’d get to meet our brother in the morning. They must have forgotten about the doctor’s words because they jumped and hollered without a care in the world. I stared at my mother’s face, her uncertainty as clear as day.

“Please, no. Not yet.”

I prayed. We were supposed to have a little while longer.

That evening I rode to the hospital with my parents as the family elephant dutifully followed the car. My sisters had stayed behind with our grandparents, who would bring them in the morning, when the doctors were supposed to begin inducing. We waited in our room as nurses busied themselves around us. As the sun set, we laid down and slept on the rigid hospital couch. My elephant curled up in the corner. We would need our strength for the next day.

I was the last of the three of us to wake up that morning of November 11. I was about to get in the shower when my mom yelled for my dad.

“Get the nurse! Something just fell out!”

They ushered me out of the room and told me to wait with my aunt, who had just arrived. I left in my pajamas with greasy, unwashed hair and sat in a standard hospital chair. We waited until the nurse came and took me back to the room.

“They sent me to get her.”

I walked in, more nervous than I had ever been in front of any other boy. That is until I saw his face. My parents had told us he wouldn’t look the same as everybody else. My father handed me my brother, and I fell in love. It didn’t matter that he had a cleft lip, that some things were a little different, because he was perfect, from his head to his eleven toes. As tears ran down my cheek, I stared, drinking in all I could of this precious baby in my arms.
“It’s going to be OK.”
My dad wrapped me in his arms as I handed my brother back to my mom. I continued to cry as I hugged my father. I had been so worried about that moment, and there I was. I felt truly alive with my love for my brother. Tears just kept coming.

Despite how I appeared, I was finally at peace. All those months I had lived in fear, anxiously waiting for God to do something, and there my miracle was. In my arms, I held the beautiful baby brother God had promised.

It had been 9:03 a.m. when my brother literally fell into the world. We loved him every moment he was here. We took a million pictures to capture it all. We were so overwhelmingly at peace and filled with so much joy. It was practically a zoo, with all the elephants in the room. On the bed, on our laps, and in our hands, elephants anywhere an elephant could stand. It couldn’t have been a more wonderful day. My sisters and I read books to our little brother. My mom changed his diaper. My dad prayed over his son.

Even as we laughed, our time with him was ticking away. His heart couldn’t beat fast enough to keep pace with our excitement. His brain couldn’t quite fathom our love. His lungs couldn’t breathe in enough of air. At 5:08 p.m., I watched as my brother took his last breath. I watched his skin lose the colors of life. I saw the blood rush to his head as he struggled to stay a bit longer. Four point seven ounces of perfection was ripped away from us far too soon.

That evening I left with my sisters and my grandparents. We went to my house, and I fell asleep in tears. The greatest day of my life had passed, leaving me with nothing but an elephant.

My now constant companion sat at the foot of the bed that night, watched over me and cried with me. He’d claimed me as his that day, and now he would never leave. He patted me with his trunk, laid himself down, and drifted off to sleep.

I remember the haziness of the next few weeks. We sat at home as people brought us food. Life wasn’t as vivid as the day my brother was born. I floated in and out of reality, escaping the feeling of time. Our emotions were so raw, seeping onto our faces with every little change. One moment tears would flow abundantly, only to be stifled by the laughter in the next. Joy was so seldom that each little joke was savored for minutes on end. I remember my dad’s face as such happiness crept over him. The pain so clear, yet the need to smile overcame it. His demeanor would change as he threw back his shoulders and tears welled up in his eyes, the purest kind of joy blooming amidst our sorrow.

My sisters returned to school rather quickly, but I stayed behind. Their classmates sent us cards and knew what was happening. On the other hand, I knew all that I would receive was blank stares and hard questions about my two-ton friend. My elephant wasn’t ready for such rejection and disregard. No way could I expose him when we both had healing scars.

For the next couple of weeks, I avoided school in favor of my elephant. He had taken it upon himself to never leave my side. Sometimes, he stretched himself across my chest, crushing my heart without any warning. I don’t think he meant me any harm; he seemed oblivious to his own size. Thanksgiving came and went without a brother for me to thank. My family and I clung to each other in the small confines of our living room. Eating and sleeping became our only reasons to move.

I finally returned to school after Thanksgiving had passed. I made myself invisible, avoiding the obvious questions of my whereabouts. I tried to keep my composure, shushed my elephant when he trumpeted in the halls. I walked into the art room and made my way around the class to the shelf with our projects on it. As my teacher handed me my sculpture, she asked the question I’d been bracing for.

“Is he still with us?”
I sucked in a breath, unable to form many words. I shook my head no.

“He was here for eight hours and five minutes.”
I could feel her compassion as tears formed in her eyes and she wrapped me up in a hug. There’s no doubt that she was thinking of her son to come. My elephant watched as the scene played out, savoring the attention. I sat back down with a little bit of hope in my soul. It’s amazing how much a single person caring lightens the load.

I went about my day, ignoring the trumpet calls of my invisible friend. I walked into the math classroom, and there my best friend stood, the only other one who knew what animal followed me around. She opened her arms when she saw me.

“Come here.”

That’s all she said. She didn’t ask any questions. She was simply there with love in her arms. My second spark of hope that day. My elephant was practically bouncing off the walls with all the thoughts coming his way. I can guarantee you’ve never seen anything quite like that, the most massive creature jumping around. It only lasted a little while, then he settled down. He sat next to my desk the rest of the day, begging for attention that I didn’t have to spare.

School went on like that, a circus of hide-and-seek with an elephant. He tried making scenes in the middle of class, but his two-ton temper tantrums went unnoticed by my peers. He’d sulk in my lap, not leaving room for much else. My life was consumed by an elephant, and I wasn’t given any choice in the matter. Grief had interrupted my plans and wreaked havoc on my emotions. My brother was dead, and no one knew he had even lived.

Finally, ninth grade came to an end. I left the halls of the junior high along with the isolation that inhabited my days there. I thought the worst of it was over, but summer brought new challenges with it. My family flew across the globe to the beautiful little island of Oahu. There we explored new landscapes and terrains, but no matter where we went, a certain elephant couldn’t be shaken. Grief still hung in the air. We were there for a reason, and the day was fast approaching.

“Did you know his name means ‘ocean’ in Hawaiian?”

Oh, Lanikai, ‘beautiful ocean,’ the shore where my heart now rests. The waves crashing on the beach. Perfect weather. A light breeze. June 24 my family walked along a white sand beach, all of us together, his ashes in tow. The sun hadn’t risen. We were all alone. We walked until we came to a cove, a single tree jutting out into the water. I had already shed many tears as we watched the sun creep from under the sea. I drew my brother’s name in the sand as the others scattered flowers all around. My dad drew a heart and placed what remained of ours inside. We sat together holding hands, an elephant watching right beside us. Then, the wave came and swept my brother away.

“The wind and the waves still know his name . . .”*

That song played in the background as my heart continued to break. I thought the worst of the pain had come at 5:08 p.m. on November 11, 2015, but I was wrong. The pain came in knowing it’d be a lifetime before I saw my brother’s face again. For now, I’d have to live for what he left behind, a family, a legacy of love.

I started high school in the fall. This time, I was determined to be on top of the world. I walked proudly in the front doors with an elephant that I wasn’t ashamed to know. I told my friends soon after, and suddenly my elephant was easier to see. He wasn’t as transparent, and soon, people started to move out of his way.

The funny thing is that the year before, I believed I was alone in my storm. But this year, I was voted homecoming attendant of the sophomore class. I found a dress and rode in a car with a stuffed elephant at my side. I waved to the crowd, to all my friends in the stands, and smiled. I was happy, and definitely not alone.
“OMG! She has an elephant with her!”

The girly squeal brought such joy to my heart where loneliness used to reside. How my tiny spark of hope had grown in only a year! I would never be the same, but I could learn to be OK. It’s amazing how a little love can put a skip in the step of a two-ton animal. I’d be walking to class, and he’d hop all around as my friends patted him on the head. They’d smile and wave, give him gifts on his birthday. It didn’t take much to contain him. Just enough courage to proclaim he existed.

“Who knew eight hours and five minutes would equate to a lifetime of change?”

I am haunted by an elephant. He hovers over my shoulder wherever I go. I’ve tamed him, he isn’t in control. I let him hang around in my memories and remind me that life is good. Despite all I’ve been through, I choose to believe him. Life is genuinely good. Bad things happen, but life isn’t the sum of every horrible circumstance. It’s much, much more. Life is experiencing the moments in which we are truly loved, no matter how fleeting. And I count myself and my brother among the lucky few who can honestly say:

“I have lived.”
Suffocation

Emma Jones, Drawing & Illustration. Grade 12, Plainfield South High School, Plainfield, IL. Gold Medal, New York Life Award, 2019.
Pulling Tight

Sometimes I Feel Like There’s Nothing Left