



CENTROPA *Student*

LESSON PLAN

Connecting our future to our past:
an autobiographical expedition

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Summary

Three Centropa films and Centropa's photo database are used in a lesson plan aimed at English to Second Language Learners (ESL). Based on a project-based learning philosophy that teaches writing and grammar in context, autobiographical writing is central to this lesson plan.

The general themes of this lesson plan are autobiography, time, and how the past and the future are connected. The goal of this lesson plan is for each student to deal with the subject of their own past and future and produce several autobiographical works related to their past and future. In order to achieve this students will first explore the future, then they will take a closer look at their own past through their family history. In the final exercise students will have to assess how their how their ideas have changed.

Target Audience:

11th grade, ESL-class

Number and length of lessons:

6 lessons of about 45 minutes each and one homework exercise. Lessons 1-2 and lessons 5-6 form a unit of and should, if possible, best be completed in succession.

Supplies Required

- Centropa DVD of the Mieczyslaw Weinryb (7 min 17 sec), Kurt Brodmann (6 min 1 sec) and Rosa Rosenstein (7 min 11 sec) films (recommended) or internet access to watch the films online
- Handouts and student worksheets
- Access to the internet

Synopsis

1. Introduction
2. Thinking about our future
3. Looking at the Past
4. Our Families' Past (homework)
5. Photo Memory - lesson 1
6. Photo Memory - lesson 2
7. Reflections

I. Introduction

1. Put the following quote by Russell Baker (Growing Up, page 8) on the board:

“We all come from the past, and children ought to know what it was that went into their making, to know that life is a braided cord of humanity stretching up from time long gone, and that it cannot be defined by the span of a single journey from diaper to shroud.”

2. Ask students to complete a *think-pair-share* around this quote. First, they should *think* about what it means to them for about 1 minute. Then, in *pairs* with the person next to them, they should share thoughts for about 3 minutes. Finally, the students should *share* their ideas with the class.
3. Steer the class conversation to why it is important to look into the past if you want to know your future. You may ask them:
 - How has the suffering of generations past affected the way you live your life today?
 - Are you responsible to anyone in the past? How?
4. Tell students that the following set of activities are all geared towards this idea that our past and future connect. First, they are going to explore the future, then the past. Finally, they will return to the future and see how their ideas have changed.

2. Thinking about our future

1. Put these instructions on the board, “Imagine your life in 10 years from now. Take turns interviewing one another. At the end, everyone will have to share something about their partner. Tell students to be specific. They can use the following questions to guide them, but they shouldn’t be limited to them:

- Where are you living (City? Countryside? Suburbs?)
 - In what kind of home?
 - With whom? (Husband? Wife? Partner? Parents? Children?)
 - If you are married or in a relationship, describe it. (Where/When/How did you meet? What do you like about your partner? What responsibilities do you have?)
 - If you have children, how many are there? How old?
 - Are you working? What do you do? How did you get that job? What do you like/dislike about it?
 - What did you do in the past 10 years? What are your best memories?
 - What are your greatest achievements, and challenges?
2. After allowing 5-10 minutes to interview each other, go around the room and ask students to share what their partner said.
 3. Assign the students to write a 3-4 paragraph essay about their future in 10 years time. It should provide specific details on where and what they will be doing during this time, as they did during the class discussion. This is a good time also to focus them on one key writing or grammatical idea, such as organization or future tenses. Review of some of these concepts can be covered to help them prepare the assignment.

3. Looking at the Past

1. Draw a timeline on the board. Ask students, if planet earth started 24 hours ago, when do they think life started? Point out the following key dates:
 - Life began on Earth - 4:10am
 - Dinosaur era - 22:46
 - Homo-sapiens - 23:59:56
 - Means that all of life, civilization, biblical history, industrial revolution, technology, all happened in the past 1 second
2. Ask students – What is time? Why and how is it important? Discuss with them how time, no matter how rich and powerful, is something that nobody can change. Though there are many physical theories about time, for human purposes and for the purpose of this lesson, let's agree that we often are caught up in our present time, without thinking much about how time before and after us are also part of who we are.
3. Tell students they are about to see some biographical movies about people that survived the Holocaust, namely Mieczyslaw Weinryb, Kurt Brodmann and Rosa Rosenstein. These are all

people that survived. The stories can be sad at times, happy at others. The point of watching these is not to learn history, even though through their lives you will learn some. The point is to appreciate the personal struggles these people went through, as they are generation before yours. After you watch each video, answer the questions on the worksheets.

4. Ask, what do these videos have in common? How do you relate to them? See if they can connect the fact their personal stories very much impact who they are today.

4. Our Families' Past (Homework)

1. Have students go home and interview their parents to determine their personal past, beginning with the question, "How did I get here, to the place I live, today?" and working backwards. Many students should focus on the 1930's and 1940's and the decisions or life of their grandparents. Others may need to look at the more modern past. They should dig for information, but if they can't get any because it is unknown or just not talked about at home, they should try focusing on another known time period, perhaps their parent's upbringing.
2. On a piece of paper, have pairs of students write down 3-5 questions they think would be interesting to ask. Collect these and distribute them back to the class for their use. (see box below)
3. Assign students write a 1 page family biography like you saw in Centropa. Tell students they will have the opportunity to share them with their classmates. (The text at the end of this document gives an example of what the final product could look like.)
4. Below is a list of questions produced by our class to get you thinking. From it, create a list of 10 interview questions to discover one part of the past from your family.

GENERAL REMARKS:

- **DEPTH OVER BREADTH:** Choose only one aspect of the past - such as one grandmother or family member that makes up part of who you are, and explore it deeply (instead of many aspects explored superficially)
- **ASK OPEN QUESTIONS:** Ask open questions to get the person or people in your family talking. Ask follow up, clarifying questions to get deeper and deeper into their memories.
- **RECORD:** Write down what you have found in an organized, 1 page (approx.) explanation

INTERVIEW QUESTION TIPS:

- Questions should be open-ended rather than closed-ended. For example, instead of asking "Did

you know about the Holocaust when you were growing up?” ask “Please describe the Holocaust when you were growing up.”

- You should ask factual question before opinion questions. For example, ask, “What activities were conducted?” before asking, “What did you think of the activities?”
- Use probes as needed. These include:
 - Would you give me an example?
 - Can you elaborate on that idea?
 - Would you explain that further?
 - I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying.
 - Is there anything else?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Why did you or your family decide to make aliyah?
2. Who did you come with?
3. Was it hard?
4. What were your expectations?
5. What was your image of Israel?
6. When you were young, what did you want to do when you grow up?
7. What were your ambitions for life? Did you fulfill them?
8. Did your family have any family traditions?
9. Did you wish to pass them on?
10. Were they passed on or not? Why?
11. Do you see a part of yourself in me?
12. How did you meet your spouse?
13. Describe your family. What did they look like?
14. How was your life before/after you came to Israel?
15. Have you ever lived anywhere else but Israel?
16. What do you remember from your childhood?
17. What is the source of your last name?
18. How did you feel to be a Jew (growing up)?
19. How are your present conditions in life different from the past?
20. Did you experience the Holocaust?
21. If you could go back in time, would you change anything that you’ve done?
22. How did people in Israel welcome you and what was it like being in a new place?
23. What is the difference between how you were raised and how children are raised today?
24. Where did you come from?
25. What was the reason that you decided to leave your present country?
26. How did you decide where in Israel to settle?
27. How was your life before I was born?

28. What did you lose by leaving your country?
29. What did you earn by leaving your country?
30. What were the difficulties of coming to Israel?
31. What is a memory you have of your childhood abroad?
32. What do you like about Israel?
33. What hopes did you have when coming to Israel?
34. How did you build a new routine of Israeli life? And what changed in your regular routine?
35. What emotional changes happened to you during the aliyah?
36. What were your family's ideas, and what was the fate of your family members?
37. If you could go back in time, do you regret coming here? Would you do anything differently?
38. What were the conditions that made you come here, and if the conditions had been different, would you have come here nevertheless?
39. Do your grandparents miss their homeland, though difficulties that were there back then?

5. Photo Memory - lesson 1

1. Bring students to a computer lab and introduce them to the Centropa photo database. After showing them the basics of how it works, have them choose one photo that interests them, then spend 15-20 minutes reading and summarizing the photo history. They should prepare a 2-3 minute oral summary for the class telling about the interesting things they learned.
2. After students complete their worksheets, have pairs stand and describe some of the key points they learned about each family out loud to the class.

6. Photo Memory - lesson 2

1. Put up one photo from the Centropa photo database. Tell the class that today, they will complete an assignment called, "See, Think, Wonder." Hand out a 3 column worksheet (attached below). First, ask the class to jot down in the appropriate column what they see in the photo. Give examples such as, "a man with a tall black hat." Have them share these with the class and make a list on the board. Next, ask the class to jot down notes of what they think about the things they saw. For example, "they are at a wedding." Again, let the students share what they wrote down with the class. Finally, have them complete the wonder column. Encourage them to turn on their curiosity and ask intelligent, reporter-like questions.
2. Assign the students the following task: Using Centropa.org as a model, your task will be to find one old family picture. It is best to choose one that appears to have a story behind it. Then, write a 2-3 paragraph (approx.) description of what and who you see in the photo. Answer

questions such as:

- Who and what do you see in the photo?
- What year was it taken? What was happening politically or historically?
- Who took the photo?
- What are/were the people doing in the photo (if there are people)?
- What is behind people's smiles or frowns

7. Reflections

1. Have students that are willing share either their personal stories or photo essays, read them aloud to the class.
2. Have students take out (or return at this time) their 10-year story and reflect on the change, now that they have explored their history. Have them complete the following sentence, either in pairs or in writing: "Now that I have thought more about my families past and how it got me to where I am today, my ideas on the future have/not changed because..."

Name: _____

Video #1 – My Town of Zamosc

1. In what country is Zamosc?
2. Describe the family's religious and political beliefs.
3. What was "Hashomer Hatzair?"
4. What happened to those that stayed in Zamosc?
5. What happened to his family in Kovel?
6. What did Josef do when the war ended?
7. When did communism fall in Poland?
8. Why does he mention the Zionists when he was young?

Video #2 – The Brodmann Family

1. What did Brodman's father do for a living?
2. How did he meet Franz?
3. What problems did they have?
4. What type of conditions did they live in growing up?
5. What type of relationship did he have with his Nazi teacher?
6. Why did Jews go to Shanghai?
7. What type of relationship did Kurt have with Israel? Why do you think he left?

Video #3 - Rosa Rosenthal – Living with History

1. When and where was Rosa born?
2. How did Rosa meet her husband Michi?
3. What were the living conditions like in the 20s in Berlin?
4. What type of job did they have?
5. Why did they flee to Budapest in 1939?
6. Why did her brother want Rosa to send her kids? Did she?
7. What happened to her husband?
8. What happened to her son, Georg?
9. What is the meaning and importance of Israel to Rosa Rosenthal?

ANSWER SHEET

Video #1 – My Town of Zamosc

1. In what country is Zamosc? (Poland)
2. Describe the family's religious and political beliefs. (Zionist, Reform)
3. What was "Hashomer Hatzair?" (Zionist youth organization)
4. What happened to those that stayed in Zamosc? (poor conditions, fought in war)
5. What happened to his family in Kovel? (killed in mass graves in the woods)
6. What did Josef do when the war ended?
7. When did communism fall in Poland? (1989)
8. Why does he mention the Zionists when he was young? (Because their idealism brought them there)

Video #2 – The Brodmann Family

1. What did Brodman's father do for a living? (actor in the theatre)
2. How did he meet Franzi (his wife)? (theatre – she was sitting in the front row and it was love at first sight)
3. What problems did they have? (Her orthodox family wouldn't allow an actor into the family)
4. What type of conditions did they live in growing up? (poor)
5. What type of relationship did he have with his Nazi teacher? (love hate, graded unfairly)
6. Why did Jews go to Shanghai? (Easy, no visa required)
7. What type of relationship did Kurt have with Israel? Why do you think he left?

Video #3 - Rosa Rosenthal – Living with History

1. When and where was Rosa born? (Berlin, 1907)
2. How did Rosa meet her husband Michi? (worked across the street from one another)
3. What were the living conditions like in the 20s in Berlin? (City of style)
What type of job did they have?
4. Why did they flee to Budapest in 1939? (Hitler, bad conditions for Jews)
5. Why did her brother want Rosa to send her kids? Did she?
6. What happened to her husband? (dies in forced labor)
7. What happened to her son, Georg? (Moved to Israel)
8. What is the meaning and importance of Israel to Rosa Rosenthal? (her future is there)

EXAMPLE ESSAY

The story of my existence doesn't start with my grandparents, Girshon and Rivka Hod, yet can only be read from there. Like pages ripped out of a book, my personal history was destroyed as many great uncles and aunts were burned in the Nazi crematoriums, leaving me with a sliver of pages between two hard covers.

One of the most interesting stories is that my father's parents, Girshon and Rivka, were set up by their respective sister and brother, who were married. So in the end, a brother and sister married another brother and sister.

After being introduced, Girshon (born 1905) and Rivka (1911) began corresponding through the mail. Girshon, growing up in a religious-zionistic family, believed steadfastly that Israel was the only place for Jews to live. He fought in the "Hapoel Hatzayir" and in the 1920's left most of his 8 siblings and moved to a kibbutz in Palestine. Rivka, who grew up in an affluent family because her father was the head of the JCC, also had 6-8 siblings, most of whom were killed in the Holocaust. After corresponding for some time with Girshon, he flew to Warsaw where they were married. They then left to start a family in Israel together. Settling in Haifa, they raised a family of 3, the middle of which, Yaacov, is my father.

Girshon also had 6-8 brothers and sisters who mostly vanished in the Holocaust. His father died before that, when he was 6 years old. During the war his mother (Orly Hana, whom my brother's youngest daughter is named after) escaped to Siberia. After the war, she returned to Poland but eventually came to Israel in the early 1950's. She married the chief Rabbi of Haifa (Baruch Markos) and is now buried in Hof HaCarmel. She died at nearly 100 years old. Three of Girshon's siblings also moved to Israel, together with him before the war. One of his brothers had children who were either killed or severely traumatized during the Yom Kippur war.

There are not many memories of Rivka's (Gutleiser) family, either. Her parents and nearly all of her siblings were killed in the Holocaust. There are some reasons to think she was killed in the concentration camp in Majdanek. She actually came to visit her daughter in 1939, but with the outbreak of WWII raced back to Poland to be with her family. That was the last anyone heard from her.

One of Rivka's surviving siblings was saved because she was a chemical engineer, and was moved by the Russians to Siberia to work in an ammunitions factory. After the war she returned to Warsaw. Mark Lelenthal, her son, currently lives in Rochester, New York. He was the only extended family I had, growing up in America.

There is not much more to fill the pages of my empty book.

Name: _____

SEE-THINK-WONDER Exercise

Choose at least 3 items in the photo to complete this assignment.

SEE THINK WONDER

