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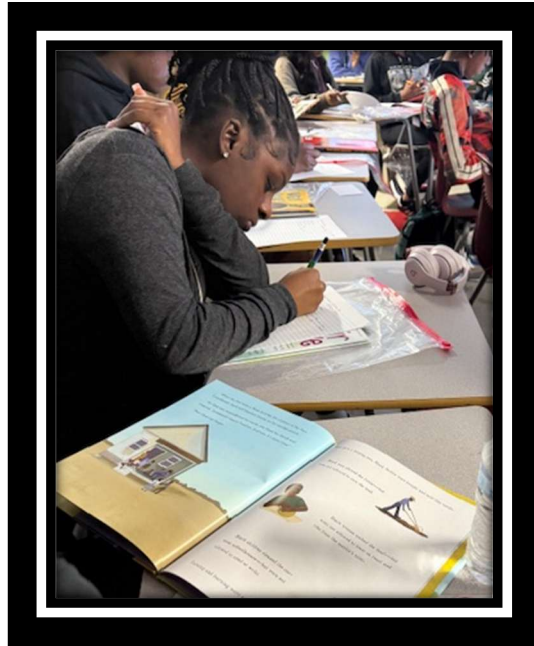
**Page by
Page**

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Page by Page

Exploring Identity and Voice Through Storytelling



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Background

Now entering my 15th year in the classroom, I've come to understand that one of the most powerful tools we have as educators is the story, especially when that story is used to affirm identity, challenge stereotypes, and build community. Year after year, I've watched students light up when they see themselves reflected in a text, and I've seen the long, uncomfortable silence that settles in when they don't. That silence speaks volumes.

This unit, *Page by Page: Exploring Identity and Voice Through Storytelling*, was born out of that tension and out of a deep hope that every student will one day see themselves, their full, unfiltered selves, celebrated in the pages of a book. This unit is designed to do more than teach literacy skills. It's designed to teach students that their stories matter. That their voices carry weight. That they are seen, valued, and powerful.

I created this unit because I believe that representation matters, not just in the texts we assign but in the voices we amplify and the platforms we create. When students are invited to analyze, write, and illustrate their own culturally relevant children's books, we're not just teaching them to be readers. We're giving them the tools to become authors, artists, and architects of their own narratives. This isn't about sprinkling in a single diverse book to check a box. It's about radically reimagining who gets to tell the story in the first place.

Page by Page brings all of this together. It invites students to explore identity, culture, bias, and belonging through the vibrant and accessible lens of children's literature. It encourages them to reflect on the single stories they've heard about themselves and their communities and then to boldly write new ones.

Most importantly, it gives them space to breathe, to imagine, and to build something real. Because when students learn to author their own stories, they're not just writing books. They're rewriting the world. And what a joy it is, as a teacher, to witness that transformation page by page.

Goals and Objectives

Teacher Goal

To create a learning environment where students feel empowered to explore identity, embrace creativity, and challenge cultural stereotypes by writing and illustrating their own children's books.

Student Goal

To understand the power of their voice and use the process of creating children's books, both written and illustrated, as a tool for self-reflection, cultural resistance, and authentic representation.

Unit Goal

To empower students to explore cultural identity, challenge stereotypes, and use the art of children's book creation as a vehicle for storytelling, representation, and change.

Objectives

By the end of the unit, students will be able to

- Analyze how children's literature can reflect or challenge stereotypes and cultural narratives
- Examine themes of identity, heritage, and resistance in age-appropriate texts
- Write and illustrate their own culturally reflective children's books that center underrepresented voices
- Use visual storytelling and written narrative to effectively communicate messages to younger audiences
- Present their completed books and reflect on both the creative process and the significance of representation in literature

Florida Standards

Grades K–3

- **LAFS.K.RL.1.3** With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story
 - **LAFS.K.RI.1.1** With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text
 - **LAFS.K.W.1.3** Use drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or loosely linked events, including a reaction
 - **LAFS.K.C.1.2** Use drawing, dictating, and/or writing to create narratives in chronological order [U.S. Department of Education+14Florida Department of Education+14readingaz.com+14CPALMS+1flbt5.floridaeearlylearning.com+1](https://www.floridadepartmentofeducation.com/readingaz.com/CPALMS/flbt5.floridaeearlylearning.com/)
 - (Visual Arts integrated standard) Describe how illustrations support and enrich the story
-

Grades 4–5

- **LAFS.4.R.2.3** Identify the main idea and relevant details in a text
- **LAFS.4.R.3.2** Summarize a text to enhance comprehension, including theme and details
- **LAFS.4.W.3.7** Conduct short research projects to build knowledge about a topic

- **LAFS.4.SL.1.4** Report clearly on a topic or text, smoothly linking ideas and details (oral presentation) [Florida Department of Education](#)[Florida Department of Education](#)
 - (Visual Arts integration) Use tools or media to create artwork that communicates a personal or cultural idea
-

Grades 6–8

- **LAFS.6.R.3.2** Paraphrase and summarize texts to enhance comprehension
 - **LAFS.6.W.1.2** Write informative/explanatory text to examine a topic and convey ideas clearly
 - **LAFS.6.SL.1.4** Present claims and findings in a well-structured manner appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
 - **SS.68.AA.1** Understand and explain how cultural stories, traditions, and historical experiences shape identity and community
[Schoolwires+7flbt5.floridaeearlylearning.com+7purls.library.ucf.edu+7CPALMS+15Florida Department of Education+15Florida Department of Education+15](#)
 - (Visual Arts) Create art that synthesizes personal or cultural experiences to communicate meaning
-

Grades 9–12

- **LAFS.912.R.3.3** Analyze how themes and central ideas develop over the course of a text, including how they interact and build complexity

- **LAFS.912.W.1.3** Write narratives to develop experiences or events using techniques like flashback, dialogue, and tension
- **LAFS.912.SL.1.4** Present information, findings, and evidence clearly, concisely, and logically
- **SS.912.AA.1.2** Analyze the impact of cultural expressions (literature, stories) on identity and historical consciousness
- (Visual Arts integration) Use multimedia or art techniques to author a visual narrative that reflects identity or social themes

 How these standards support your unit:

- They center **identity, cultural storytelling, and representation**
- They span **reading, writing, speaking/listening, and civic/social understanding**
- They integrate with **visual arts and creative expression** for holistic engagement

Course Outline / Overview

This 2- to 3-week unit guides students through the process of exploring identity through the lens of children's literature. After analyzing mentor texts that celebrate diverse voices and challenge traditional narratives, students will write and illustrate their own children's books. These books will be rooted in personal or cultural identity and serve as a creative way to communicate lessons of empowerment, resilience, and representation to a younger audience.

Suggested Extension Activity

Middle and high school students can then participate in a "Read Aloud Showcase" with elementary school students or peer presentations.

Step-by-Step Procedure: Page by Page Unit

Step 1: Unit Opener – Making It Personal

Before handing out a single book, I started with a simple yet powerful question:

“When was the first time you saw yourself represented in a book?”

Students had a few minutes to think, then responded in writing. Those who couldn’t recall such a moment were asked to reflect on how that absence might have made them feel. This created an immediate emotional connection to the unit’s purpose and opened the door for rich, vulnerable conversations.

Step 2: Book Pass – Getting to Know Children’s Literature

Next, I introduced a *book pass* activity. I set up stations around the room with a variety of culturally diverse children’s books. Students rotated in small groups, spending 3–4 minutes with each book. As they read, they completed a simple reflection chart that asked:

- Who is this story about?
- What culture or identity is being represented?
- What message is being shared?
- Did you connect with this story? Why or why not?

This helped students explore the wide range of stories that exist — and the many that are still missing. It also gave them a sense of what makes an engaging children’s book, both visually and narratively.

Step 3: Class Discussion – Why Representation Matters

After the book pass, we gathered for a full-class discussion. Students shared their favorite discoveries, talked about common themes, and reflected on who was missing. This conversation helped solidify why we were doing this unit — not just to read books, but to reclaim the narrative.

Step 4: Mini-Lessons – The Building Blocks of Storytelling

Over the next several days, I taught a series of short mini-lessons to build key skills. These included:

- Story structure (beginning, middle, end)
 - Character development and identity
 - Theme and message
 - Writing for a younger audience
 - Visual storytelling techniques (with examples of illustration styles)
- Each lesson was paired with mentor texts and a short practice activity to apply the skill.

Step 5: Brainstorming – Finding Their Story

Students brainstormed ideas for their own children's book by answering questions like:

- What do I want younger kids to know about my culture or identity?
 - What stereotypes do I want to challenge?
 - What parts of my story haven't been told?
- They mapped out story ideas using a graphic organizer that included character profiles, setting, plot outline, and message.

Step 6: Drafting and Storyboarding

With ideas in place, students wrote their first draft and then created a storyboard to plan their illustrations. I reminded them that their visuals were just as important as their words — both needed to work together to tell a clear, meaningful story.

Step 7: Peer Feedback – Strengthening Voice and Vision

Students participated in peer review circles, where they shared their drafts and received feedback using guiding questions. We focused on clarity, cultural authenticity, emotional impact, and age-appropriateness. Students then revised their drafts accordingly.

Step 8: Publishing – Bringing Books to Life

Once their final drafts and illustrations were complete, students used digital tools like StoryJumper (or hand-drew and assembled physical books) to

publish their stories. The room buzzed with pride as students saw their stories take shape in full color.

Step 9: Author Showcase – Sharing Our Stories

We hosted an “Author Day” celebration where students read their books aloud in small groups or recorded video readings. Some even wrote dedications in the front of their books. The joy in the room was unmatched — students were proud, empowered, and finally seen.

Step 10: Reflection – Looking Back, Looking Forward

To close out the unit, students responded to two reflection prompts:

- What did you learn about yourself during this process?
- Why does representation in children’s books matter?
Their responses were heartfelt and honest. Many shared that this was the first time they felt like they were *writing* history, not just learning about it.

Teacher Approved Platforms

Here's a list of user-friendly, teacher-approved platforms that let your students create and publish their own children's books, whether digitally or in print. I've included a mix of free and paid tools, starting with one of my personal favorites, StoryJumper, which I absolutely love and use with my own students. It's intuitive, fun, and the kids get so excited seeing their stories come to life!

1. StoryJumper

- What it is: A super intuitive, kid-friendly platform where students can write, illustrate, narrate, and publish their own books.
 - Features: Audio recording, collaboration tools, classroom library, hardcopy ordering.
 - Teacher bonus: Free educator accounts with tools to manage student projects.
 - Website: storyjumper.com
-

2. Book Creator

- What it is: A flexible digital book-making app where students can combine text, images, video, audio, and drawings.
 - Features: Drag-and-drop tools, read-aloud functions, real-time collaboration.
 - Teacher bonus: 1 free library with up to 40 books; paid upgrades available.
 - Website: bookcreator.com
-

3. WriteReader

- What it is: A literacy-focused platform designed for younger students (K-5) to create and publish books with dual-language support (student and teacher text).
- Features: Image bank, voice recordings, simple interface.

- Teacher bonus: Aligns with literacy standards and supports early writers.
 - Website: writereader.com
-

4. MyStorybook

- What it is: A straightforward tool for creating and publishing digital storybooks with illustrations and text.
 - Features: Online drag-and-drop design tools.
 - Teacher bonus: Easy to use and very beginner-friendly.
 - Website: mystorybook.com
-

5. Storybird

- What it is: A beautifully designed platform where students create visual stories inspired by professional illustrations.
 - Features: Art-first storytelling, poetry tools, challenges, class assignments.
 - Teacher bonus: Class library and assignment features for creative writing.
 - Website: storybird.com
-

6. Lulu Junior

- What it is: A physical book-making kit you order and students fill out, send back, and receive a printed book in return.
 - Features: DIY print book kits for home or classroom use.
 - Teacher bonus: Great for end-of-year keepsakes or book fairs.
 - Website: lulujr.com
-

7. Toontastic 3D (by Google)

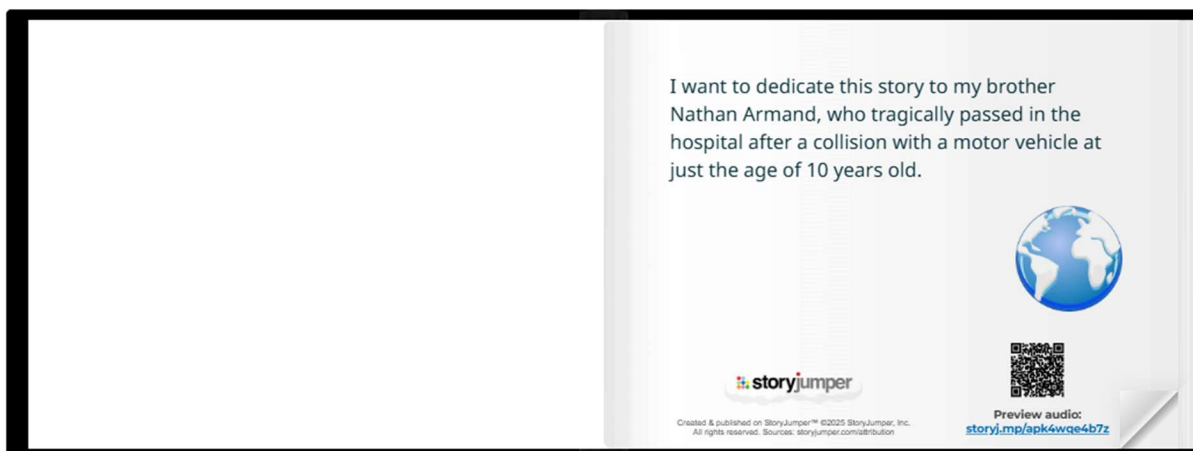
- What it is: A storytelling app where students create animated cartoon-style stories with voiceover narration.
 - Features: Drag-and-drop scenes, character animation, audio recording.
 - Teacher bonus: Perfect for students who love visual storytelling and performance.
 - Device needed: Works best on tablets or Chromebooks.
 - Website: toontastic.withgoogle.com
-

8. Blurb

- What it is: A platform for creating professional-looking print books, magazines, and eBooks.
- Features: Layout tools, image integration, bookstore-quality publishing.
- Teacher bonus: Better for older students (middle/high school) or collaborative class books.
- Website: blurb.com

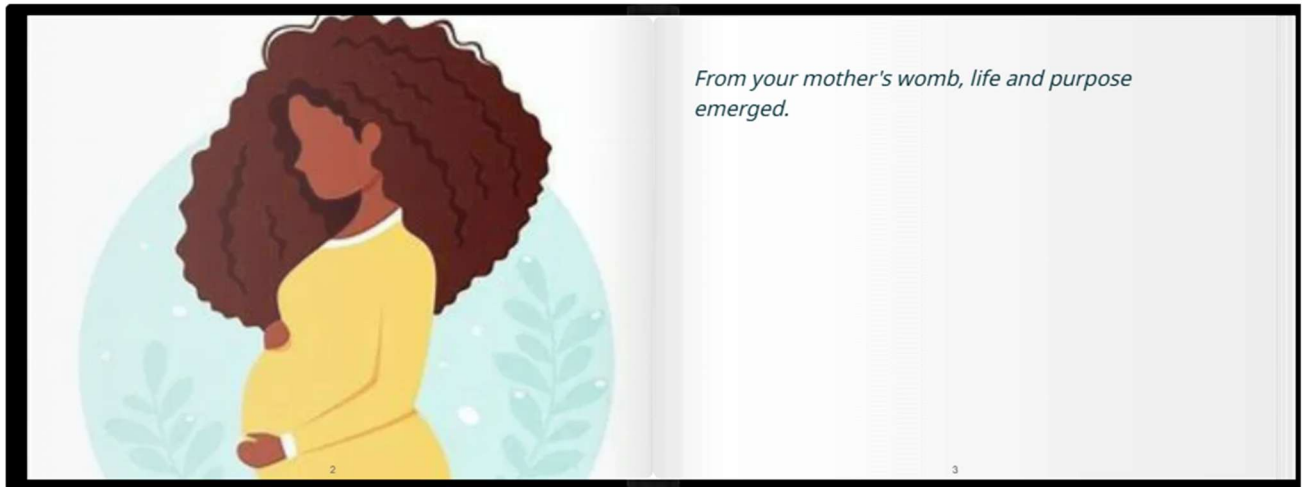
Student Samples

This book was written by a 10th grader named Matthew. In this beautiful book, he writes about the little brother he lost in a car crash.



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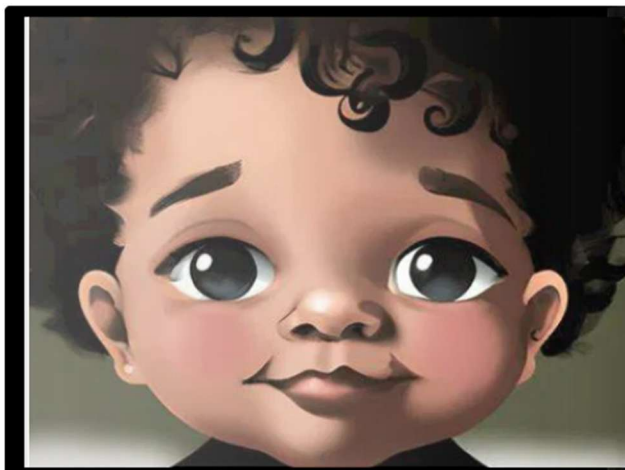
END >



*From your mother's womb, life and purpose
emerged.*

< BEGINNING

END >



*A beautiful black baby with eyes filled with
hope...*

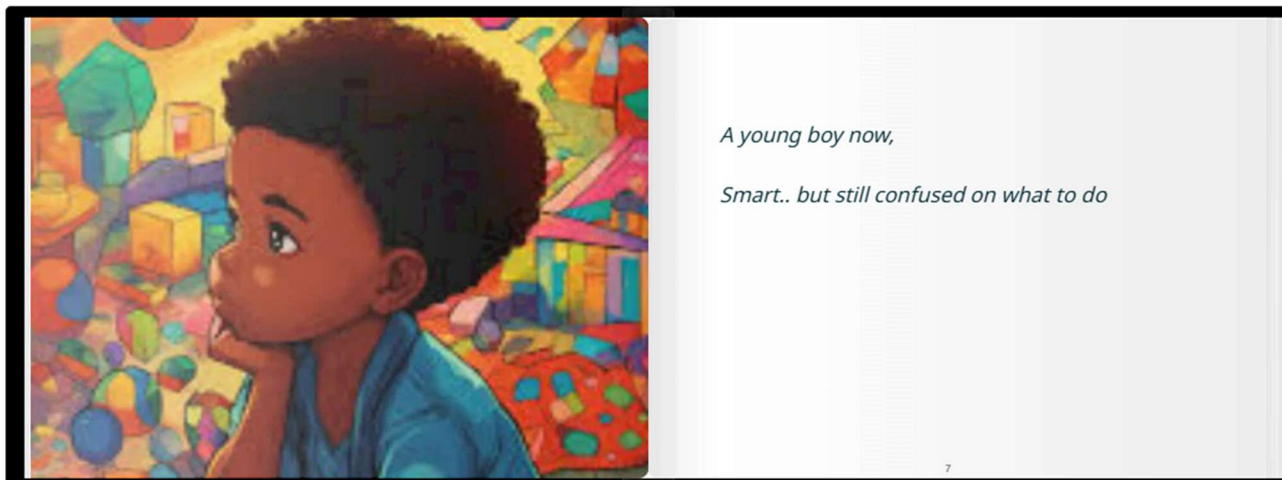
Filled with purpose

Unknowing how much this life will be so hurtful

So treacherous....

< BEGINNING

END >



< BEGINNING

END >

Read the rest of his book here

<https://www.storyjumper.com/book/read/179353611/68267de52e688>



Student Worksheets

StoryStarter™ Worksheet	
1. CHARACTER: Who is your main character, and what is your character like?	
2. CHALLENGE: What challenge or problem must your character solve?	
3. MOTIVATION: What is motivating your character to solve the challenge?	
4. SETTING: Where and when does your story take place?	
5. OBSTACLES: What obstacles stand in his/her way?	1.
	2.
	3.
6. CLIMAX: How does he/her finally solve the challenge?	
7. OUTCOME: What is the outcome of the story?	

Children's Book Rubric - African American History (StoryJumper Project)

Story Elements & Structure (20 pts)

Excellent (20 pts):

Includes all key elements and is 20 or more pages long.

Good (16 pts):

Includes most elements and is 18 to 19 pages long.

Satisfactory (12 pts):

Includes some elements and is 15 to 17 pages long.

Needs Improvement (8 pts or below):

Missing several elements or fewer than 15 pages.

Character Development (20 pts)

Excellent (20 pts):

African American character is deeply developed with motivation and personality.

Good (16 pts):

Character is African American and shows traits and motivation.

Satisfactory (12 pts):

Character is African American but lacks depth.

Needs Improvement (8 pts or below):

Character is unclear or underdeveloped.

Creativity & Originality (20 pts)

Excellent (20 pts):

Highly creative, original, age-appropriate and engaging.

Good (16 pts):

Shows creativity and holds interest.

Satisfactory (12 pts):

Some creative ideas but may be predictable.

Needs Improvement (8 pts or below):

Lacks creativity or is unsuitable for children.

Use of StoryJumper (Visuals/Layout) (20 pts)**Excellent (20 pts):**

Strong visuals and thoughtful layout.

Good (16 pts):

Good use of visuals and layout.

Satisfactory (12 pts):

Some visuals support story, but inconsistently.

Needs Improvement (8 pts or below):

Visuals are minimal or distracting.

Dedication Page (20 pts)**Excellent (20 pts):**

Heartfelt and meaningful dedication included.

Good (16 pts):

Dedication shows effort.

Satisfactory (12 pts):

Dedication is vague.

Needs Improvement (8 pts or below):

No dedication page or very little effort.