5.1 Mandala Autobiography

Level: Foundational

Rationale: As a foundational piece of writing, the autobiographical essay serves many purposes: to better acquaint students with one another; to engage students in reflective thinking and writing; to develop students’ abilities to write descriptively and personally; to develop students’ abilities to navigate the writing process. This assignment has the added benefit of having a visual/symbolic component which enhances students’ abilities to think beyond the literal level.

Suggested Timeline: 18–21 hours, depending upon the number of focus lessons taught, the amount of writing time provided in class, and the number of revisions students undertake (see “How to Use This Book” for additional guidelines).

Materials:
- mandala example (from book or Internet; see “Note” below)
- autobiographical mandala example (teacher-created)
- colored markers/pencils
- paper
- large circles cut from posterboard
- computer access
- Student Samples 5.1a–5.1d
- Student Handouts 5.1a–5.1d
- Student Handouts 2.5–2.7; 2.9–2.13 from “2: The Writing Process”
- selected focus lessons from section 4 of this guide

AVID Methodologies Used (WIC-R): Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading

Prewriting

1. EXAMPLE: Ask students, “What is a mandala?” Record their ideas on the board or on a piece of chart paper. Show a mandala example large enough for students to see the details, and ask them to tell what they see. Record their ideas on the board or on a piece of chart paper. (Observations might include: color, symmetry, pictures [symbols], a sense of “wholeness” represented in the circular design, the mood, and the overall message communicated.)

2. ANALYZE: Ask students, “What is a symbol?” Identify various symbols in the mandala. (If students are unfamiliar with symbols, follow step 3 below to clarify. If they already understand symbols, skip to step 4.)

3. CLARIFY: On the board, write the words sign and symbol as titles in a T-Chart. Ask students to discuss the meanings of the two words and tell how they are different. Write the meanings on the chart. Ask students to give examples of signs and symbols to add to the chart. Draw illustrations next to the examples.
Extend the T-Chart with as many signs and symbols as students can generate. Other ideas for symbols include a flute for the love of music, a tree for the love of nature, an open hand to represent friendship.

4. **BRAINSTORM:** In groups of three, have students consider and brainstorm answers to this question: “What are some things a circle can symbolize or represent?” Ask each group to share a thought about the symbolism of circles with the rest of the class. Record their ideas on the board or on a piece of chart paper.

5. **DEFINE:** Distribute Student Handout 5.1a and review it with students. Tell students they are going to create a symbolic picture representing aspects of their own lives. Link to the significance of circles just discussed by asking, “Why might a circle be an appropriate/effective symbol for displaying other symbols that represent our lives?” Discuss; record students’ ideas on board.

6. **GUIDED VISUALIZATION AND QUICKWRITE:** Look over the list below and select two or three scenarios that you would like to use with your class; adapt/adjust them to suit the needs of your students. Set aside time to lead students through each scenario. Spreading them out over time (over the course of the class period or over the course of several days) tends to enhance student focus/productivity. (This is a perfect example of how the seemingly linear process presented in these lessons is not linear! This work—leading students through visualizations—could actually be done before introducing the mandala; it could be done over time and tucked away in a safe place [a classroom writing folder, etc.] and pulled out when needed.)

**Visualization Scenarios:**

- Think about a significant day in your life: Who was there? Where were you? What was happening? Why is the day important to you?
- Think about a series of favorite locations from throughout your childhood. These places might range from Dad’s lap, to Grandma’s kitchen stool, to a secret hiding place beneath a willow tree, to a national monument. As you think of these favorite locations, try to determine why each place was special and what each one represented. (You might want to offer a personal example to get students thinking.)
- Envision the people closest to you/most special to you. Who are they? See their faces. View their actions. What have they done or what do they do that makes them special?
- Think about the objects in your life that are most important to you. What are they? Feel yourself holding them. How do they make you feel? Where did you get them? Why are they special?
- Think about a difficult time in your life. What was going on? Why were you struggling? Who was there to help you up? How did you respond to the challenge?
• See your life as a journey. What does it look like—a bumpy road, a river…? Where did the journey begin? Where has it led you? Where is it heading? How has the trip been? What part of the journey might be particularly important, maybe a defining moment?

Visualization Steps:

A. Select a scenario; adapt/develop/adjust it to meet the needs of your students.

B. Have students close their eyes. Guide students through the scenario, setting the mood/tone with music, lighting, etc. (It always helps to offer concrete examples throughout this step. It is equally important to allow quiet work time for students to think without interruption.)

C. Have students open their eyes—remaining silent—and create a picture or graphic display of their thoughts.

D. Have students do a quickwrite about their picture/graphic display.

E. Give students the opportunity to share their visual and quickwrite with a partner or in a triad/small group.

F. Have students put their work away in a designated place (if these visualizations are being spread out over time).

G. Repeat this process for each scenario you choose to explore with students.

7. LIST AND SHARE: Distribute Student Handout 5.1b and then direct students to do the following:

A. Review your quickwrite and picture/graphic display.

B. List in the left column the things most important in your life: people, experiences, beliefs, objects, places, etc.

C. Working with a partner (or in a small groups), draw or describe at least one symbol to represent each of the items in the left column. These symbols should then be recorded in the middle column. Example: Use a dove to represent peace or a heart to represent love. Collaborate with your partner or group to fill in the right column, working to find the deeper meaning behind the selected symbols.

8. MODEL: Model a sample mandala on the board or overhead projector (either draw your own mandala or project a former student’s mandala), using five personal symbols. Place one main symbol in the center and four other symbols around it. Next, demonstrate or show the connecting design that holds the symbols together. Discuss how the connecting design can create a unifying theme, solidify the overall message, and/or create a mood/tone. For example, a student might use water droplets as a connecting design throughout the mandala because the drops represent tears and “washing away.” (They could also represent purity/cleansing/renewal.) Another student might simply use geometric shapes to create a symmetrical pattern that holds the main symbols together. Such a pattern could represent unity/order/cohesiveness/constancy of purpose. Connecting designs might also help students later in their writing as they look for ways to transition between ideas/symbols.
9. **CREATE:** Have students follow the steps below to create individual mandalas.

A. Have students review their lists of symbols and highlight those they want to consider using in their mandalas.

B. Help students narrow their lists by asking them the following questions:
   - If you could only highlight one symbol on your list, which would it be? This symbol should be the *largest* in terms of its overall meaning. It should encompass your *essence*, and/or represent the most significant thing about you. It should be the one you MUST share with others. Highlight that symbol now. (This will likely be the symbol the student uses in the center of the mandala.)
   - What symbols, when grouped together, define the most essential elements of your life?
   - What symbol offers special/unique insights about your life?

C. Have students select five highlighted symbols on their lists to use in the creation of their mandalas. As they select their final symbols, they should think about how the different symbols work individually, yet flow together. Each symbol should be unique enough to warrant a body paragraph about it, but all symbols should link up to tell a whole, “connected” story.

D. Using unlined paper, have students draw a circle and make a rough sketch of their mandalas, putting the most important symbol in the *center of the circle*, and arranging the other four symbols around it in an order that makes sense. This step should be done quickly; students shouldn’t get caught up in the artwork quite yet. Instead, they should focus on how the pieces of the mandala will create a whole story. They should also think about the overall feel, mood, or message of the mandala.

E. Remind students about the connecting design in the model mandala and how it can serve several purposes. (Review as needed.) Explain that they will now collaborate with others to determine an appropriate connecting design, unique to their symbols.

F. Working in small groups, have students follow these steps:
   - One at a time, students share their rough sketches, explaining the symbols of their mandalas, and clarifying how they will “tell their stories.” They should also share their thoughts about the overall feel or message they hope to achieve/convey.
   - Peers offer feedback about the symbols, their order, the flow, the story, the desired feel, etc.
   - All group members brainstorm ideas for a connecting design.
   - All group members discuss the brainstormed ideas and offer suggestions as to the purpose that each might serve in the student’s mandala.
   - Following the discussion, the student selects his/her connecting design.
   - Repeat these steps for each group member.

G. Distribute pencils, colored markers, and round pieces of poster board or white paper, and have students create their mandalas. They should be encouraged to make their mandalas as artistic as possible, adding color to enhance the overall appeal. (Remind students of the power of color and how colors can be symbolic.)
10. EXPLAIN ASSIGNMENT/RUBRIC: Distribute Student Handout 5.1c. With the class, read through the handout, taking time to answer questions, explain, and clarify. This is also a good time to model/teach/review how to dissect a prompt. (See Section 8 “Timed Writing” for details about dissecting a prompt.) Once students are clear about the assignment, distribute Student Handout 5.1d. Read through the rubric, pointing out the differences among the four levels. An interactive and effective way to go over a rubric is to have four students come to the front of the class to help explain the four levels. Give each student a sign—VERY EFFECTIVE, EFFECTIVE, SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE, INEFFECTIVE. Ask students to read the bulleted sentences for their part of the rubric. Student 1 reads the first sentence under “Very Effective,” followed by Student 2 who reads the first sentence under “Effective,” and so on. To keep students involved and thinking about the different criteria, other members of the class could be asked to paraphrase or point out the main differences among the four bullets. (Obviously, you will have to decide how much time to spend on this, but it’s important that the rubric is well understood.) An added bonus to this approach is that it gets students up and speaking. Plus, it adds a listening and critical thinking component to this step of instruction. It is little activities like this, done early in the year, that help build confidence in student speakers!

11. SELECT AN AUDIENCE: Have students choose an audience for their mandala and autobiographical essay (their classmates, a family member, etc.). Tell them to write their audience on Student Handout 5.1c.

12. PLAN: Ask students how they might organize a piece of writing based on their mandalas. Help students to see that each symbol could easily become a body paragraph; the mandala invites an organizational scheme.

Example (Seven Paragraphs)

- The first paragraph is an introduction to the student—who he/she is. An opening anecdote that relates to the symbols in the mandala can be especially effective, as can linking to the connecting design or introducing the theme or message of the mandala.
- The middle five paragraphs explain each of the five parts of the mandala, presented in an order that makes sense to the student. Each paragraph explains the symbol, its meaning, and its importance in the student’s
life. The power of the body paragraphs can be enhanced by linking each back to the opening theme or message or to the connecting design.

• The seventh paragraph is one of reflection in which the writer pulls the entire piece together, linking all symbols to a common message of growth or development. It tells about the overall significance of the symbols as they relate to how the student sees him/herself today.

13. OUTLINE: Have students develop an outline for their autobiographical paper, using their mandala.

**Drafting**

1. **WRITE:** With their outlines and mandalas in front of them, have students write their first drafts quickly (in one sitting if possible). Since they’ll be revising, they should not be concerned about producing a finished, polished piece at this point. They should use this draft to find out what it is they want to say. Even though this first effort is quick, tentative, and exploratory, students should write a *complete* draft, organizing and developing as well as they can.

   Many students at the foundational level will struggle to finish a complete draft in one sitting—they will need additional support at this stage. You can help by suggesting they focus on drafting *one paragraph at a time*. Have students write an introduction, for example, then stop, share introductions with partners or small groups, participate as you conduct a focus lesson on introductions, collaborate with others to apply the ideas from the focus lesson, then move on to the next paragraph. This drafting, sharing, reteaching cycle should continue with each paragraph of the paper. Focused writing such as this could take place in a few small groups with a tutor/teacher facilitator if the whole class does not require scaffolding.

   All students should take advantage of working with others as they seek to transfer their ideas from symbols to words. Collaboration might include: discussing introduction options, trying out phrases or sentences to determine which sounds best, practicing explaining a symbol aloud before writing ideas down, adjusting the organization, scheme, etc.

   It’s important that you (or tutors) circulate among students to help guide them between their prewriting and their first drafts. Students who get bogged down by trying to choose the perfect word will need prompting to move the writing along. (They can come back later to wordsmith.) Well-placed questions/statements can propel students forward in their writing.

   **Questions/statements that can guide students who are stuck on the introduction:**

   • What must I know about you or your life to understand/be introduced to the rest of the paper?
   • What story would introduce me to the symbols in your mandala?
   • What message do you want to leave in my mind when I finish your paper? How can you establish that message (theme) here?
   • How do you want me to feel at the end of your paper? How can you establish that feeling here?
   • How might your connecting design set up an introduction idea?
   • What is your paper really about? Is it about struggle? Triumph? Hope? Despair?
   • Do you have a unifying theme or message in mind?
**Questions/statements that can guide students who are stuck on body paragraphs:**

- What is your major idea for this symbol? What is important about it? Why did you choose it?
- Read your last paragraph aloud and then start writing the next paragraph.
- Tell me what you’re trying to say in this paragraph. (While the student talks, act as a scribe, writing down the main ideas to give back to the student for “fleshing out.”)

**Questions/statements that can guide students who are stuck on the conclusion:**

- How do all of the symbols in your mandala come together to create a whole?
- What do you want your reader to be thinking about as he/she sets your paper down? How can you prompt that thought?
- What growth/development did you experience?
- What is the message behind the symbols? How can you make that message explicit?

2. **INTRODUCTION:** Conduct a focus lesson about effective introductions (Focus Lesson 4.11) or review the information if this has already been done. After the focus lesson, project a student introduction from the class on the overhead (with the student’s permission, of course). Have students offer feedback and ask questions. Guide them in the rewriting of the introduction, pointing out key elements/changes that could improve its effectiveness. (Model as many examples as needed to teach/apply the desired concepts.) Have students work with partners to review and rewrite their introductions, as needed, to make them more effective.

3. **SENTENCE CRAFTING:** Based on students’ needs, conduct whole-class or small-group focus lessons about sentence-combining (Focus Lesson 4.17) and/or “showing” writing (Focus Lesson 4.6) to help students write more developed and complex sentences with more descriptive detail. Students who don’t need this instruction can work with other students to help them with sentence crafting. These student “experts” can be very effective models and teachers.

4. **TRANSITIONS:** Conduct a focus lesson on transitions (Focus Lesson 4.12). It is easy for a paper to become choppy, with paragraphs coming across as completely separate. Students may struggle to connect paragraphs and will benefit from direct instruction on how to do so. Use the mandala to demonstrate how to refer back to its connecting design or overall message as a method for connecting paragraphs together. Once you have explained and modeled methods for transitioning between paragraphs, students should be given the opportunity to apply the methods to their own papers.

**Reader Response**

1. **MODEL OBSERVING A MANDALA:** Ask for a volunteer who is willing to have his/her mandala and paper displayed to the class. Have students look at the mandala and discuss what they see and what they think is important based on the visual depiction of symbols. Record students’ comments on the board.

2. **MODEL GIVING A RESPONSE:** Display the introduction paragraph from the student’s first draft on the overhead projector. Read the introduction aloud and compare it to what students observed about the mandala. Are there things in the introduction that don’t seem to make sense, given the focus of the mandala? Are there things the writer has included that are especially powerful and that draw the reader into the essay? Make notes on the introduction about its strengths and any points of confusion. Identify places where more information is
needed and write a statement or comment in the margin that indicates this. Use “I” statements to frame these comments/questions. (See Student Handout 2.12.)

As a class, look at the first body paragraph and identify the focus. Which symbol is being explained? Based on the notes on the board, what do you expect to read about this symbol? What expected elements are included by the writer? Have students answer; write their ideas on the draft. Now read the paragraph through and ask: What is missing? What did you expect that isn’t here? What extras or nonessentials are included? Write students’ ideas on the draft.

As a class, read both the introduction and the first body paragraph a second time. While reading, indicate especially strong wording with a wiggly line under it. Indicate a confusing or awkward sentence/phrase (place where the reader stumbles) with a straight line under it. Write comments in the margins that indicate questions/responses the readers have (e.g., “How is this sentence connected to your last sentence?” “I’m not sure what you’re describing here.” “I am interested in...”).

3. **DEBRIEF:** As a class, look at the feedback generated for the introduction and first body paragraph. Have students identify the steps modeled for giving a response. List these steps on the board for student reference. Discuss how this kind of feedback can be helpful to the student as he/she starts to revise. Field questions and clarify expectations about giving productive responses to a peer’s writing.

4. **VERBAL FEEDBACK:** Now that students have been walked through a model of how to give feedback, it is time for them to practice. Working in small groups or with a partner, have students respond verbally to the introduction and first body paragraph of each other’s papers, as outlined below.

A. Students view the first mandala, generating observations and expectations before they listen to the actual paper being read.

B. The first student reads his/her paper aloud while group members write and code their comments as described in the reader-response section of this book. (Use Student Handout 2.5 or 2.6.) When the student is done reading, listeners share their comments.

C. The student assembles a list of peers’ comments and asks follow-up questions, as needed.

**Sample Follow-up Questions**

**About the introduction:**
- How effective is the story I am using to introduce you to my symbols?
- What message do I seem to be establishing in my introduction?
- What feeling do I seem to be establishing in my introduction?
- How well do I use my connecting design as an introduction idea?
- What is my paper really about? Is it about struggle? Triumph? Hope? Despair?
- Do I have a unifying theme or message in mind?

**About the body paragraph:**
- What is my major idea for this symbol? What is important about it? Why do you think I chose it?
- Do you understand what my symbol represents about me? Where do I need more explanation?
- How can I describe my symbol better so that a reader can “see” it without seeing the actual mandala?

D. Repeat the above steps for each group member.
5. **DEBRIEF:** Ask students to share examples of particularly helpful comments/suggestions/feedback they received; write some of these on the board. Next, ask for examples that don’t seem to be helpful. Discuss the differences between the two. Give students time to restate unclear/weak comments to make them more effective.

6. **CONTINUE VERBAL FEEDBACK:** Have students repeat steps 4A–4D for the remaining body paragraphs.

7. **OPTIONAL DEBRIEF:** Repeat step 5 for the body paragraphs.

8. **CONTINUE VERBAL FEEDBACK:** Have students repeat steps 4A–4D for the conclusion, using the follow-up questions listed below:
   - Is it clear why the chosen symbols of my life are important? What should I add to my conclusion to make it clearer?
   - Do all of the symbols in my mandala come together to create a whole?
   - What does my conclusion make you think about as you set my paper down?
   - What personal growth/development did I communicate?
   - What is the message behind the symbols? How can I make that message clearer?

9. **OPTIONAL DEBRIEF:** Repeat step 5 for the conclusion.

10. **OPTIONAL WRITTEN FEEDBACK:** At the foundational stage, students are often better at talking about their feedback ideas than writing them down. This written feedback option should be saved for a second round of feedback, if used at all. To guide written feedback, use Student Handouts 2.7 and 2.9, determining beforehand which questions students should answer. Have students exchange papers and complete the targeted reader-response questions.

11. **OPTIONAL READER-RESPONSE EVALUATION:** If students are learning how to give effective reader responses with this assignment, collect the reader-response comments to identify where additional teaching is needed. Have students write the name of each responder on the appropriate page of comments and on the rough draft so it’s easy to tell who gave what feedback. Students should staple the rough draft together with all reader-response notes. Review the papers and notes, and then assemble a summary overhead transparency that gives examples of both helpful and ineffective comments/questions. During the next class meeting, display the examples and discuss why they are helpful or ineffective. Discuss how to strengthen the ineffective comments/questions.

---

**Revising**

1. **MODEL OBSERVING A MANDALA:** Ask for another volunteer who is willing to have his/her mandala and paper displayed to the class. Have students look at the mandala and discuss what they see and what they think is important based on the visual depiction of symbols. Record students’ comments on the board.
2. **MODEL USING STUDENT READER RESPONSES:** Display the introduction paragraph of the student’s paper (and accompanying reader-response comments) on the overhead projector. Read the introduction aloud and review the comments given during reader response. Ask students the following questions: “Based on the comments/questions, what revision decisions might the writer make?” “What could be added, deleted, or changed?” Make notes using colored overhead markers. Help students to see how they can use the reader-response comments/questions to shape their revision decisions. If a comment is especially ineffective, discuss how it limits the writer and doesn’t offer much help for revision. (This is a KEY thing for students to learn if they are to become independent in seeking out good reader responses.) Take some time to make actual changes on the paper, further demonstrating the final effect of useful reader response.

Continue the revision practice by looking at the first body paragraph and modeling the same thinking, using the reader-response comments to determine what to change, add, or delete. Get student input for these decisions; explain the thinking about the changes so students understand the decision-making that occurs with revision.

3. **DEBRIEF:** Review the processes students have just gone through in the modeling exercise in order to make sound revision decisions. Have students step back and evaluate what is challenging and what is easy about these processes. Discuss why writers revise—what’s the purpose? Have them identify what they need to make revision more manageable (work with a partner, do it in chunks, define focus questions, etc.).

4. **REVISION PLAN:** Have students review the verbal and/or written feedback they received from peers and then make a list of revision priorities: what to do first, second, third, etc. as they attack the revision process. Have students share their plans with a partner and compare their priorities.

5. **REVISE USING FEEDBACK:** Using their revision plans and their reader responses, have students revise their drafts. This process initially should be done in class so students can collaborate with one another during the process and teacher/tutors can circulate and guide. It is a good idea to have students work on computers, as they are much more efficient and can type in different fonts/colors/etc. (It is helpful to make all of the changes in the same color. For example, type additions in red, deletions in blue, etc.) Using computer technology is especially efficient because the original can be copied and revised in several different ways, different options can be typed up for consideration, and pieces can be printed out as models.

- This process can be time-consuming, but it is well worth it. If students learn how to give effective feedback and how to use feedback for effective revision, then their writing will be stronger and they will experience increased confidence and a greater command of the writing process.

- Giving and receiving quality feedback is very challenging for students. They have to see and hear how it’s done and then practice it many times. Be patient with students and continue to give explicit direction and guidance.

- If you have already done informal reader-response evaluations in steps 5, 7, and 9 above, this step may not be necessary. Use this option if you want to do a more thorough evaluation of individual student’s responses or if you want to evaluate a second round of reader responses.

- To avoid getting bogged down with all of the papers, consider collecting just a sampling of the feedback. Have student groups submit a paper with feedback that seems particularly helpful and one with feedback that seems to be ineffective, or have students record both helpful and ineffective examples on a T-chart. Review what is collected and create target lessons, as suggested above.
Students need to be reminded that revision is more than simply rewriting the paper a single time. Revision entails working/molding each part of the essay; it requires refining, perfecting, and blending to achieve final form. In much the same way a musician is taught to learn a piece of music (by practicing a few measures at a time), students should be taught/encouraged to focus their revision efforts, addressing small pieces and/or concepts, eventually blending them all into a final draft.

6. MODEL USING RUBRIC: Once you have modeled examples of using reader-response comments to guide revision, and once students have completed a revision using peer response, model how to use the rubric as a source for revision as well. Distribute Student Handout 5.1d. Have students look at their copies as you read the criteria for an “effective” paper and discuss what each element means. Have students take notes on their rubric as the class discusses and clarifies the meanings of the elements. With the criteria in mind, read a volunteered student essay aloud, from start to finish, as it is projected on an overhead or computer screen. (Distribute copies of the sample essay to students for reference.) Have students, working in pairs, consult the “effective” criteria listed on the rubric and evaluate the strengths and needs of the paper. On a sheet of paper, have pairs draw and label three columns (the first column labeled “Criteria,” the second column labeled “Strengths,” and the third labeled “Needs”). In the “Criteria” column, have students write down the first element on the “Effective” list on the rubric. In the second column (“Strengths”), partners should write what is strong in the paper that is related to this element. (They should be looking for and noting evidence that demonstrates this criterion is true of the paper.) Next, partners should write in the third column (“Needs”), what the paper needs to better meet the specific element in the first column. As a class, review each element of the “Effective” criteria and determine if the paper is effective, as written, or if it needs attention. Make notes on the draft about what the student could do to strengthen that element of the paper. Continue with each element on the list of “Effective” criteria. When finished, ask students to consider this question: “What if this student wanted his/her paper to be “very effective” not just “effective”? What would he/she have to do during revision?” Make notes of what students say; discuss how to use this feedback to make revision decisions.

7. REVISE USING RUBRIC: Using their second drafts, have students work to make a second round of revisions based on the rubric criteria. Again, while students are learning this process, it is best to do it in class so they can collaborate and teacher/tutors can guide.

8. TIMELINE: Establish a time frame for completing the paper and provide opportunities for students to get additional reader responses/make further revisions prior to the due date.

9. REPEAT: Have students repeat the reader response (verbal or written, partner or small group) and revision processes for each draft until it is time to submit the paper.

Editing

1. SPECIFIC FOCUS LESSON: Conduct an appropriate focus lesson to highlight specific needs that have surfaced in your students’ writing. It could be a lesson on using commas, on common spelling mistakes, noun-verb agreement, etc. Decide what is appropriate for the class or for specific small groups within the
class. After the focus lesson, have students look for and correct errors on their papers specific to the lesson. Students can do this themselves or exchange papers with others to get “fresh” eyes. (You may need to do more than one focus lesson.)

2. **GENERAL EDITING:** Complete this stage in two steps:
   - Have students read their latest draft to themselves, looking for and correcting spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage errors. If the draft has been done on a computer, have students use the spell checker. (Students should use the spell checker with guidance and direction, knowing that it is not always accurate. Guidance is especially important for students learning English as a second language, as they often cannot tell when the spell checker is giving them wrong information.) During this step, students should be encouraged to write questions and/or make notes concerning errors they aren’t able to fix.
   - Next, have students work with a partner/tutor or in small editing groups to further identify errors and to receive help with questions/concerns they were unable to correct themselves.

3. **REMINd:** Tell students: “The way you present your paper says a lot about you as a writer and about your concern for the reader. A paper filled with misspelled words, punctuation mistakes, and grammatical errors is difficult to read, and all of your ideas and hard work may be lost in the confusion of errors.”

4. **REWRITE:** Have students use the editing suggestions to make any corrections needed on their paper. They should then rewrite and type a final draft. You might want to have students write their final drafts in a special font on the computer to help them stay with the spirit of the symbolic and personal that is so much a part of the mandala.

5. **FINAL PROOFREAD:** Have students exchange their final drafts with other students for a final proofread, or have a tutor act as a proofreader to find any remaining errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or grammar. Students should then correct these last mistakes.

---

**Publishing**

1. **FOR THEIR CHOSEN AUDIENCE:** Depending on the students’ audience, they might want to mount their mandalas and autobiographies on a large sheet of construction paper so they will be situated side by side for viewing.
   - Allow time for in-class reading of autobiographies (or excerpts of same) for those students who chose their classmates as their audience. An effective arrangement would be to have students sit in a large circle for the reading/viewing of the mandalas.
   - For students who chose the school as their audience, their mandalas and autobiographies could be posted in the classroom, library, or other appropriate place on campus. Or a class publication might be created for sharing with other AVID classes, families, etc.

2. **FOR THE TEACHER:** Have students compile their work into one package that includes the following pieces, in order. (Remind students to label all parts of their package.)
• The self-evaluation/reflection
• The final draft of the paper
• All previous drafts and revisions of the paper, numbered by draft
• Verbal response group comments/written responses
• All prewriting

Self-Evaluation/Reflection

1. WRITE: Using selected questions (3–5) from Student Handout 2.11, have students reflect on their learning from this writing assignment. They should also compare their paper to the rubric and then rate or score it.

2. DEBRIEF: Once students have completed their self-evaluations/reflections, have them share and discuss some of their responses. The goal is to help students write effective reflections by encouraging them to give deep thought to their learning and goals. Students need practice to see that their reflections are not just an exercise done for the teacher, but an opportunity for them to recognize what they’ve gained from an experience (in this case, writing their papers). Give feedback on their reflections, and have students rewrite them as a way to improve the quality of the writing and to reinforce your writing expectations. It is also a good idea to share with students some especially strong reflections from previous classes.

Adaptations to Simplify the Lesson (Increase Scaffolding)

1. Spend a significant amount of time on the development of the mandalas. Students who feel invested in their visual depictions often feel more connected to the writing.

2. Break down the initial drafting process into small pieces. Rather than having students write the first draft in one sitting, have them do it in pieces (or paragraph by paragraph), offering support along the way.

3. Add more modeling of the various steps; practice each step in class with teacher/tutor guidance.

4. Do drafting and revising in class and only one revision. During the drafting and revising, slow down the process so students can write together and talk regularly while they work.

5. During the various stages of writing, partner a capable writer with a less capable writer.

6. As needs surface, conduct additional focus lessons to support students.

Adaptations to Make Lesson More Challenging

1. Decrease the amount of guided instruction given during the prewriting or drafting stages; students may be able to work ahead at their own pace.

2. Have students revise several times, generating multiple drafts and really focusing on the revision process.

3. Have students work on enhancing the narrative, focusing their writing on SHOWING more about their mandala symbols rather than just TELLING about them (see Focus Lesson 4.6).
4. Have students develop a rough draft and a final draft of their mandala, enhancing the latter with artistic features. Students might want to experiment with using different media for the mandala (paint, charcoal, pastels, etc.).

5. Have students focus on connecting their theme, mood/tone, and message more completely.

6. Have students develop their conclusions more thoroughly, demonstrating a higher level of insight or epiphany.

7. Have students move away from the suggested seven-paragraph structure and organize their papers in unique/original ways.

Suggested Reading Selections Appropriate for This Lesson

- Samples of student work, generated by your own class
What Is a Mandala?

A mandala is a wondrous and meaningful design made in the form of a circle. The word mandala is from the classical Indian language of Sanskrit and, loosely translated, means “circle.” These special drawings were first created in Tibet over 2,000 years ago. Traditionally, they displayed highly intricate illustrations of religious significance and were used for meditation. Since then, they have been made by people from various cultures. In the Americas, Indians have created medicine wheels and sand mandalas. The circular Aztec calendar was both a timekeeping device and a religious expression of ancient Aztecs. In Asia, the Taoist “yin-yang” symbol represents opposition as well as interdependence. Over the past 2,000 years, mandalas have become a tool for displaying individual and cultural uniqueness the world over.

A simple definition of the mandala is that it is a circular drawing made to represent the harmony and wholeness of life or the wholeness of a person. Tibetans used mandalas for calming themselves and for thinking about the meaning of life. *Today, people often create mandalas to form a simple representation of who they are.* To make a mandala, a person begins by thinking of symbols that represent him or her. These symbols might include a dove to represent peace, a heart to represent love, or an open hand to represent friendship. The symbols a person chooses are then carefully drawn in the mandala.

The shape of a mandala is a circle because a circle is the most simple and universal shape found in the world. It is the form of the eye, the sun, a snowflake. Also, since there is always a center to a circle, as you look at a mandala it exercises your mind and draws you into the center of yourself or your topic.

For more information about mandalas, visit these Web sites:

- Aztec Calendar: www.crystalinks.com/azteccalendar.html
- Mandalas in Education: www.mandalaproject.org/What/Index.html
- Mandala Links: www.abgoodwin.com/mandala/ccweb.shtml
The Symbols of My Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things Important to Me</th>
<th>Symbols Representing the Things Important to Me</th>
<th>What the Symbols Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling safe</td>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>Peace in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Love/unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Rainbow</td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Examples*
Mandala Autobiography: Assignment Description

Using your mandala as the basis for your writing, create an autobiographical essay that reveals some significant aspects of your life. Your essay should describe the symbols you’ve chosen for your mandala, what the symbols mean, and why they are significant representations of your life. You should also help your reader to understand how all these symbols come together to demonstrate unity or wholeness, how they hold together to communicate the “essence” of who you are.

Think about the audience to whom you’d like to write. Suggestions:

A. Your AVID classmates
B. Your family
C. Your teacher
D. Your school (The mandala and writing might be publicly displayed.)

Using the space below, indicate your focus. Be as specific as possible.

**Audience** to whom you’re writing: ______________________________________________

**Purpose:** To communicate to another person or other people some areas of your life that you consider important. You want your audience to understand who you are as they read about what’s important to you.

**Form:** Essay

**Essay length:** approximately 2–3 pages, double-spaced, in a legible font. (You might want to use a special font for this essay to help personalize it and connect it to your mandala.)

**Due date:** ___________________
# Mandala Autobiography: Rubric

The following rubric should give you ideas about writing and evaluating mandala autobiography papers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Somewhat Effective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• mandala includes at least five symbols that represent unique/varied aspects of the writer and/or his/her life</td>
<td>• mandala includes at least five symbols that represent important aspects of the writer and/or his/her life</td>
<td>• mandala includes five symbols that represent aspects of the writer and/or his/her life, but some aspects seem to lack importance or appear to be redundant</td>
<td>• mandala is underdeveloped and/or incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mandala demonstrates symbolic purpose and is visually appealing</td>
<td>• mandala is creative and visually appealing</td>
<td>• mandala displays symbols, but lacks detail and/or visual appeal</td>
<td>• mandala displays few, if any, symbols and lacks visual appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the mandala’s connecting design is purposeful and unifies the mandala</td>
<td>• the mandala’s connecting design is unique and enhances the overall mandala</td>
<td>• the mandala’s connecting design is evident, but does not enhance the overall mandala</td>
<td>• the mandala has no connecting design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• essay thoroughly describes and explains the symbols contained in the mandala</td>
<td>• essay describes and explains the symbols contained in the mandala</td>
<td>• essay attempts to describe and explain the symbols contained in the mandala; some symbols may be more developed than others</td>
<td>• essay describes and/or explains some aspects of the writer but the description/explanation is not connected with specific symbols or the description and explanation are underdeveloped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• essay uses strong sensory details to bring each symbol to life</td>
<td>• essay includes details associated with the symbols</td>
<td>• essay includes some details, but more are needed to truly understand the significance of each symbol</td>
<td>• essay does not include enough detail to clarify each symbol or clearly convey what is significant to the writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• essay organization creates a wholeness for the essay; well-crafted transitions unify ideas and propel the reader forward</td>
<td>• essay organization is logical; transitions unify ideas and help the essay to flow</td>
<td>• essay organization lacks logic and creates some confusion; transitions do not always link ideas; paper may seem choppy</td>
<td>• essay organization is confusing; transitions are inappropriate or are missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contains richly detailed sensory images and varied vocabulary</td>
<td>• contains sensory images and appropriate vocabulary</td>
<td>• contains workable but not fully effective vocabulary</td>
<td>• contains simple and/or incorrect vocabulary that interferes with communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contains varied sentence structure</td>
<td>• contains sound sentence structure</td>
<td>• sentence structure demonstrates problems and/or lacks variety</td>
<td>• sentence structure problems interfere with communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has few, if any, mechanical errors</td>
<td>• may have some mechanical errors, but none that interfere with understanding</td>
<td>• has some mechanical errors that interfere with understanding</td>
<td>• has many mechanical errors that interfere with understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My Life

Kevin Rivera

Athletic, friendly, and loving are three words that describe me the best. There are many values that make one unique. I am unique in my own way and the characteristics that make me that way is the love I have from my family, the friendship I express, the nature I endorse, the sports fan I am, and the knowledge I have. Each of these characteristics has had its ways in making me who I am today.

A big part of my life is my family. I am there when they need me and I can always know their presence is there when I need them. I am always a loving person when it comes to my family. There is nothing on earth that can take away the love we express for one another. There might be rough times in life but the love of my family is always consistent.

There is no person that can get through life happily without friends. I for one think I'm very good at finding them and adding them to the ones I have. Sure as time goes by you lose friends but that is when one needs to become open to new friends. It takes a long time to grow an old friend, but when one does the process starts all over again. Making and losing friends is one of many journeys life faces, hence I am always kind and courteous to my friends and their beliefs.

I am a very serious person when it comes to keeping the world clean. I love the beauty of nature and I do my part on keeping it that way. I get disgusted when I see people litter and act like the world is a great place. I keep the world around me clean by picking up after myself and influencing my peers to do the same. The beauty of nature is immense and I don’t ever plan on doing anything to damage it.

I am a big sports fan whether my team wins or loses. I support the home teams like the Padres and Chargers however when it comes to choosing among them I am a CHARGERS fan until I die. The philosophy I have towards the Chargers is “Win, lose, or tie Chargers till’ I die.” I love playing sports and consider it my favorite hobby.

I don’t consider my self the brightest kid but I do know I am not the dumbest either. When I work hard I can accomplish the goals I am striving for. There are subjects I am not that strong in but there are others where I am excel at. I consider myself weak in math but strong in English. My favorite part of English is writing essays because I can really express myself. I think that most people can get the best of my ability by assigning essays.

I am a one and only person, I am unique in my own way, but the best part of my life is that it’s my life. I have achieved many goals in my life so far but with the values I have I know that I can accomplish even more. My life has just begun, it’s like a flower beginning to blossom, but just wait until I grow up, I will have done something great with my life.
Autobiographical Mandala Essay

Martha Perez

My mom always says, “Try your hardest and you will succeed in life.” This always spurs me on to do my best and keep on trying. It gives me the ability to go through each day with the courage to try new things and succeed. Because of the support the symbols in my life give me, I can accomplish all my goals. The three things that give me the courage to go through life are my family, friends, and my education.

Family is a key ingredient to success. This is especially true for me because I received a lot of support from my parents when I was learning English. They were there for me even when they couldn’t help me with my English. This gave me the initiative to try my hardest to learn this new language. Because of their confidence in me I was able to reach my goal and learn English. They talk to me about real issues and don’t treat me like a kid. They always help me explore new concepts and ideas. They promote independent thoughts, regardless of what theirs might be. Now when I try something new, I don’t hesitate but just take the big leap to success.

Friendship keeps me from going insane. My friends help me deal with all the problems that overwhelm me at the worst of times. They keep me from berating myself with useless criticizing over petty mistakes. They are the ones who stand with me when I am at my worst and don’t abandon me for it. They give me the courage to say what is on my mind instead of shying away. They are a part of me that I would not sacrifice.

My education is something so dear to me, it is with me at all times. It helps me express myself in so many ways. I know I can forge a better future for me and my family with my education. It is like a best friend, disappointing at times but always bringing joy to my life. I think that it defines who I am as much as my family and friends do. I can only hope that I won’t let my education down by failing, but I know that with it by my side I can do anything.

Every day is a new challenge brought forward, but I know I can face it. I have the support of a loving family, caring friends and a great education. What more can a girl ask for? I mean, I have the makings of a great future. With all this backup I know I’ll make it though life. Who knows, perhaps you’ll hear about me someday.
My Mandala

Lency Hernandez

Bang! Gunshots... many of us don’t realize what is important to us in a daily basis until something dangerous interrupts our daily lives. For example, God, family and social life are important factors to me. These three are all things that I have on my Mandala and that I feel are important because they are what make me feel like Lency. Why God, family and social life?

Everyone has his or her own morals and beliefs, and for me that everyday strength is God. Ever since I was a little girl my family and I began attending church. Little by little I started learning about God and my personal beliefs. Now as a teenager I know in my heart that there is a God out there that died and gave his life for us sinners. My faith and the fact that I believe in God are first in my Mandala because I know in my heart what I feel and what he is capable of doing to this world. As a young Catholic girl, I know that having faith and believing in one’s self is important and makes each and everyone of us our own unique individual.

You are probably wondering why family comes after faith, that is because without God’s creation of human kind we would not have a family. On the other hand family is a major puzzle piece that completes the collage of things that are important to me. Thanks to God and life I life with both my parents and siblings. My dad is like the outside shield that protects us from the scary monsters. My mom is the one who always is updating everything and making sure we get through each and every day. My sister Ashley; Wow! I lover her to death. I don’t know what I would do with out her; she makes me feel like a sister because we have good and bad moments that we’ll have in our hearts forever. Max, he is my older brother and my hero. I admire him to death because he is one smart/talented fellow, and his presence makes me feel protected. My dog Coopi is also part of my family, and I love her too. She is like my best friend I guess that sayings is true “A dog is man’s best friend”.

Social life plays a major role in my life because it’s what I do. For example my friends Ana, Maribel, Erika, Jatziri, Miyuki and Martha are all important to me because I know that I somehow share a similarity that bonds me to them. Friends are always there for you one way or another. Friends will come with you to a party, watch a movie or even go shopping for a whole new wardrobe for your closet. Friends are also there cheering you on. They have encouraged me to get involved in a physical activity that allows me to stay in shape. I’m talking about field hockey. Field hockey is important to me because it’s an extra curricular activity that keeps me busy and in shape, and I enjoy it at the same time. I met new people when I joined field hockey my sophomore year, and since then I’ve been a field hockey player.

What is important to you? I know that for me I have God; family and social life. It’s like the three MUSKETEERS; all three of them together are what named them like that; same with me. Those three added all together basically concluded to equal an individual, and that’s me. All of us have our own Mandala and our own beliefs, and that is the key that makes each one of us individuals. What’s in your Mandala?
Mandala Autobiography

Nicole Osborn

My name is Nicole Osborn and I would like you to know about some areas of my life that I consider important. I also chose symbols to represent these specific areas.

The first symbol I would like to talk about is the heart. To me the heart means love and caring for others. I consider this important in my life because when you love and care about other people, they usually seem to respect who you are and love and care about you back. I care about my family and friends. I tell them what the right thing for them to do is. I wouldn’t want them to get hurt or stuff like that. Love and care is not only important to me but also those who I love and care about.

The second symbol is my family. This is a symbol in which I consider the most important to me. The symbol of my family means to me about the friendly family relationship I have with them. My family is important to me in many ways. They help me with any kind of problem I have, whether it’s at school, about homework, or other people. They help me in any way they can and support me about things I do right. I am glad for them being here for me.

The next symbol is a book. It means that I have a passion for reading. Reading different types of books helps me understand and learn new things, not only from fiction books but also from non-fiction books. Another reason I like to read is because of what the plot is about that keeps me wanting to read in an interesting novel or mystery.

The other symbols I have are a series of different sports. They are: a baseball and bat, a tennis ball and a tennis racket, and a basketball. As you can see I like sports. I think sports are important to me because of the variety of different sports I get to learn and play. I also get to meet new people who like the same sport as me. I think it helps you become more active and not stay at home and eat junk food and watch TV all day. Without sports I would be dealing with a boring life.

The last symbol I have is an eye, which is in the center of my mandala. Personally, I would say that the eye means my uniqueness. It is also the way I see people in my own perspective.