Title/Author: *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters* by Barack Obama

Suggested Time to Spend: 7 Days (Recommendation: one session per day, at least 30 minutes per day)

Common Core grade-level ELA/Literacy Standards: RI.2.1, RI.2.2, RI.2.4, RI.2.6, RI.2.7; W.2.2, W.2.8; SL.2.1, SL.2.2, SL.2.5, SL.2.6; L.2.1, L.2.2, L.2.4

Lesson Objective:

Students will listen to an illustrated letter from a father to his daughters read aloud and use literacy skills (reading, writing, discussion, and listening) to understand the central message of the letter. The central message of the letter celebrates the characteristics that unite all Americans from our nation’s founders to today’s generation.

Teacher Instructions

**Before the Lesson**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis below. ***Please do not read this to the students****.* This is a description to help you prepare to teach the book and be clear about what you want your children to take away from the work.

Big Ideas/Key Understandings

* Ideals that have shaped our nation and characteristics that unite all Americans
* Potential within each of us to pursue our dreams and forge our own paths.
* Everybody has good qualities and has the potential to pursue individual dreams.

Focusing Questions

* Who are you? What defines you as a person? What good qualities do you possess?
* Who in history might have shaped those qualities in you?
* How might these qualities help you to achieve your dreams?

Synopsis

This is a letter from President Barack Obama to his daughters, where he poses reflective questions regarding the character of his daughters and gives an example of historical significance to illustrate each characteristic. The letter ends with an explanation that all American generations are made up of different religions, backgrounds, beliefs, and races, and that President Obama’s daughters are part of the future.

1. Go to the last page of the lesson and review “What Makes this Read-Aloud Complex.” This was created for you as part of the lesson and will give you guidance about what the lesson writers saw as the sources of complexity or key access points for this book. You will of course evaluate text complexity with your own students in mind, and make adjustments to the lesson pacing and even the suggested activities and questions.
2. Read the entire book, adding your own insights to the understandings identified. Also note the stopping points for the text-inspired questions and activities. *Hint: you may want to copy the questions vocabulary words and activities over onto sticky notes so they can be stuck to the right pages for each day’s questions and vocabulary work.*

The Lesson – Questions, Activities, and Tasks

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Questions, Activities, Vocabulary, and Tasks** | **Expected Outcome or Response (for each)** |
| **FIRST READING:**  Read aloud the entire book with minimal interruptions. Stop to provide word meanings or clarify only when you know the majority of your students will be confused. | The goal here is for students to enjoy the book, both text (rhythm) and pictures, and to experience it as a whole. This will give them some context and sense of completion before they dive into examining the parts of the book more carefully. |
| **SECOND READING:**  **Reread pages 2 and 3.**  *What did the author mean when he wrote, “She helped us see big beauty in what is small…?”*  Show pictures of Georgia O’Keefe’s art work on the projector.  (<http://gardenofpraise.com> for supporting picture on Georgia O’Keefe’s art work)  **Reread pages 4 and 5.**  *What does the author mean when he says “That you braid great ideas with imagination?” The author chose the word braid here to talk about how Albert Einstein pulled all of his new ideas together into new thoughts. Why do you think he used the word “braid?”*  If students need help to understand what it means to braid ideas together, the teacher may use yarn to demonstrate the act of braiding with different colors and make the connection to putting many ideas together to develop a new idea. (<http://gardenofpraise.com> for supporting picture on Albert Einstein)  **Reread pages 6 and 7.**  *The text says, “He swung his bat with the grace and strength of a lion and gave brave dreams to other dreamers.” What does this mean?*  (Background information on Jackie Robinson may be needed, since the text doesn’t directly explain his role as an African American baseball player. )  (<http://mrnussbaum.com>. This website has biographies for kids of famous leaders and inventors, including Jackie Robinson)  **Reread pages 8 and 9.**  Show additional pictures of Sioux tribes living in the plains and their cattle roaming freely. Relate the pictures to the vocabulary that the author uses to paint the picture of a free spirit.  Then ask, *what did Sitting Bull mean by “For peace, it is not necessary for Eagles to be Crows?”*  (<http://mrnussbaum.com>. This website has biographies for kids of famous leaders and inventors, including Sitting Bull.)  **Reread pages 10 and 11.**  Play one or more audio clips from Billie Holiday. Ask students how the songs make them feel. Discuss how music creates a feeling.  [http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist\_id\_holiday\_billie.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_holiday_billie.htm" \t "_blank) for Billie Holiday  **Reread pages 12 and 13.**  Show the following video clips and discuss characteristics of Helen Keller.   * http://gardenofpraise.com for more information on Helen Keller. * http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=lUV65sV8nu0 has a short video clip of a movie of Helen Keller using Sign Language   **Reread pages 14 and 15.**  *Where else have we heard the word equal? What does the word equal mean?*  Show pictures of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Civil Rights Memorial. Show pictures of other Memorials (e.g. Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument).  Reflect back on Veterans Day. *Soldiers that went to war sacrificed their lives for our freedom. What does it mean to make sacrifices?*    *Inspire means to uplift or encourage, e.g.: Barack Obama’s book will inspire you. What inspires you to…?*  **Reread pages 16-19**  *What does the author mean by “ unyielding compassion”?*  Show a video of a boycott or people marching.  **Reread pages 20 and 21.**  *Why did the author use the words: lunar landing leaps?*  *Teacher may address alliteration in a mini-lesson.*  **Reread pages 22 and 23.**  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzbL3X68TEI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzbL3X68TEI" \t "_blank) for a 6.5 min-video on Cesar Chavez’s life  **Reread pages 24 and 25.**  *What is slavery?*  *Then ask students to listen to this sentence, “He kept our nation one and promised freedom to enslaved sisters and brothers.” What do you think the author meant in this sentence?*  **Reread pages 26 and 27.**  *What does the language make you picture in your mind, when the author says “His barefoot soldiers crossed wintry rivers, forging ever on?”* | *Georgia O’Keefe makes big paintings out of small objects. For example, she paints a small flower on a large canvas.*  *Combine/put together great ideas*  *He used the word braid to create a visual image in the mind of the reader.*  *He was brave. He helped others to be brave.*  *People shouldn’t act like someone they are not. Eagles are more peaceful. Crows circle and feast upon the weak.*  *Take the base word of equal; math term: equal is the same.*  *Making sacrifices means doing without something to help or serve someone else.*  *It means that no matter what happened to Martin Luther King, he always showed caring and concern.*  Students may reference the picture and explain how the astronaut is leaping into the air.  *Being held against one’s will.*  *We were all together.*  *He promised that the slaves would be free.*  *The solders didn’t have any shoes. It was cold. They kept going even though they were cold.* |
| **THIRD READING:**  Continue the lesson by discussing a character and his/her traits. Give examples from previous stories read in class, which students can easily relate to.  Prompt students to think of a text previously discussed in class, such as *A Bad Case of the Stripes* by David Shannon, that has a strong focus on character traits. Have students refer back to that story and list the different character traits of the main character (i.e. Camilla Cream’s character traits. For example, Camilla Cream is: scared, unique, sick, nervous about being different, a fan of lima beans, etc…)  Since authors of fictional stories, such as *A Bad Case of Stripes*, want their characters to be like real people, they provide the characters with traits. The characteristics that real people possess cause their actions, words, thoughts, motivations, and feelings.  Say to the class: *As I reread the text aloud, I want you to listen for the question that is posed by the author and the characteristic that the question refers to. We will record our information in a graphic organizer.*  Provide students with, or model the process of creating, a graphic organizer. The organizer should have 13 rows (one for each historical figure) and 3 columns. Column 1 will answer the question: What characteristics did President Obama choose to focus on when writing this letter to his daughters? Column 2 will answer: Who did the author choose to represent the characteristic? And column 3 will answer: What did the historical figure do to demonstrate this characteristic?  **Reread pages 2 and 3.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 4 and 5.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 6 and 7.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 8 and 9.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  *Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.*  **Reread pages 10 and 11.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 12 and 13.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 14 and 15.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 16 and 17.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 18 and 19.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 20 and 21.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 22 and 23.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 24 and 25.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  Guide students to complete the corresponding piece of the graphic organizer.  **Reread pages 26 and 27.**  *What characteristic does President Obama identify for his daughters on this page?*  *What historical figure did he choose to represent this characteristic?*  *What actions connect this historical figure with the characteristic?*  **Reread the last three pages.**  *What characteristic is shown on pages 28 and 29?*  Display images of the historical figures highlighted in the text for students to refer back to during the culminating activity. | Children will refer to familiar books in order to understand what a character trait is.  ***Creativity.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Georgia O’Keefe.*  *She helped us see beauty through her paintings/art.*  ***Being smart.***  *Albert Einstein.*  *He changed the world through science, by turning his ideas into scientific concepts*  ***Being brave.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Jackie Robinson.*  *He showed us how to turn fear to respect and respect to love.*  ***Being a healer, or keeping the peace.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Sitting Bull.*  *He healed broken hearts and broken promises by urging peace.*  ***Being influential/ charismatic/ compassionate/ an individual.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Billie Holiday.*  *Her beautiful songs made people feel deeply.*  ***Strength and courage.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Helen Keller.*  *Although she was blind and deaf, she taught people to talk to and listen to each other. She did not use her disability as an excuse.*  ***Honor.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Maya Lin. She designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Civil Rights Memorial. She used art to inspire people to reflect on the past and to fix the future.*  ***Kindness.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Jane Addams.*  *She fed the poor and helped them find jobs.*  ***Determination and perseverance.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Martin Luther King, Jr.*  *He gave us a dream that all different kinds of people would walk hand in hand.*  ***Being an explorer.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Neil Armstrong.*  *He was the first man to walk on the moon.*  ***Inspiring others.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Cesar Chavez.*  *He demonstrated inspiration by showing farmworkers their own powers when they felt they had none. He encouraged farm workers to march for their rights.*  ***Teamwork.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was Abraham Lincoln.*  *He knew that all of America should work together.*  ***Pride.***  *The historical figure that demonstrated this trait was George Washington.*  *He turned an idea into a new country.*  ***Being accepting of unique people.***  *We are all different, but we are all one because we live in the United States.* |
| **Culminating Activity**  Say: Remember we talked about character traits. Here are the words that we used to describe these historical figures. [Teacher to distribute words to the students.] Now, let’s match these traits to the figures (pictures). Do this in whole group.  Thinking about these traits that we’ve discussed over these last seven days, think about the following:   * Using the traits that we’ve read in the story, what unique gifts do you possess that could contribute to this nation? * How do you use these strengths to help others? * Which of these historical figures do you share characteristics with?   **Teacher will model the culminating activity.**  Say to the class: Boys and girls, we have covered many characters and their traits. Now we will create a foldable showing how we connect to some of the characters in this book.  Step 1: Create your foldable. Fold paper in half along the longer half of the paper… hot dog fold. Cut the top fold into thirds.  Step 2: Think about three characters that you connect to. Turn to a partner and talk about three characters that you connect to.  Step 3: How do I connect to Georgia O’Keefe? | Example: I connect to Georgia O’Keefe. On the top foldable, draw Georgia O’Keefe (teacher models this).  Example: I love art and I love being creative. So I will write a short paragraph under the first foldable flap. For example: “I am creative like Georgia O’Keefe. She sees beauty through small things. I like to create beauty out of recycling materials.”  Finished product: Display student work, with a headshot on a bulletin board. Include the pictures and character traits of the historical figures on the bulletin board display. |

FINAL DAY WITH THE BOOK - Culminating Task

Remember we talked about character traits. Here are the words that we used to describe these historical figures. [Teacher to distribute words to the students.] Now, let’s match these traits to the figures (pictures). Thinking about these traits that we’ve discussed over these last seven days, think about the following:

* Using the traits that we’ve read in the story, what unique gifts do you possess that could contribute to this nation?
* How do you use these strengths to help others?
* Which of these historical figures do you share characteristics with?

Students will turn and talk to their partners about their strengths.

Students will create a three-tab foldable, by folding a piece of construction paper in half, along the longer side. Divide the foldable into three sections. Students will identify three historical figures from the text whom they share a character trait with. On the top folds, students will draw three pictures – each picture will depict a trait of each historical figure selected. Students will write about each historical figure on the bottom fold.

**Teacher will model the culminating activity.**

Say to the class: Boys and girls, we have covered many characters and their traits. Now we will create a foldable showing how we connect to some of the characters in this book.

Step 1: Create your foldable. Fold paper in half along the longer half of the paper… hot dog fold. Cut the top fold into thirds.

Step 2: Think about three characters that you connect to. Turn to a partner and talk about three characters that you connect to.

Step 3: How do I connect to Georgia O’Keefe?

**Finished product**: The finished product should have a short paragraph describing the trait that the student connects to. For example, “I am creative like Georgia O’Keefe. She sees beauty through small things. I like to create beauty out of recycling materials.”

**Display student work**, with a headshot on a bulletin board. Include the pictures and character traits of the historical figures on the bulletin board display.

Vocabulary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **These words merit less time and attention**  (They are concrete and easy to explain, or describe events/  processes/ideas/concepts/experiences that are familiar to your students ) | **These words merit more time and attention**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, and/or are a part  of a large family of words with related meanings. These words are likely to describe events, ideas, processes or experiences that most of your student will be unfamiliar with) |
| Page [Helen Keller] – Courage – Bravery; the ability to do something that frightens most  Page [Maya Lin] – Equality – Fairness; the same  Page [Jane Addams] - Hope – The feeling that what is wanted can be had  Page [Neil Armstrong] – strides – To walk with long steps  Page [Cesar Chavez] – Picketed – A person engaged in a demonstration  Page [Abraham Lincoln] – Kin – Family  Page [George Washington] – Justice – Being fair; fairness  Page [George Washington] – Forging – To move ahead slowly | Page [Maya Lin] – Honor – High respect  Page [Maya Lin] – Sacrifice – Something you give up for the good of someone or something else  Page [Maya Lin] – Memorial – Something designed to preserve the memory of a person or event  Page [Martin Luther King, Jr] – Compassion – Concern for others  Page [Cesar Chavez] – Inspiring – Motivate or encourage  Page [Abraham Lincoln] – Enslaved – To lose one’s freedom  Page [George Washington] – Liberty – Freedom  Page [second to last page] – Unique – Special; one of a kind |

Fun Extension Activities for this book and other useful Resources

**Resources to use for visual and audio support:**

* <http://gardenofpraise.com>. This website has biographies for kids of famous leaders and inventors. Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Georgia O’Keefe
* <http://mrnussbaum.com>. This website has biographies for kids of famous leaders and inventors. Neil Armstrong, Maya Lin, Jackie Robinson,Sitting Bull.
* [http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4948](http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4948" \t "_blank) for Jane Addams
* [http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist\_id\_holiday\_billie.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_holiday_billie.htm" \t "_blank) for Billie Holiday
* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzbL3X68TEI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzbL3X68TEI" \t "_blank) for a 6.5 min-video on Cesar Chavez’s life
* [http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=lUV65sV8nu0](http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=lUV65sV8nu0" \t "_blank) has a short video clip of a movie of Helen Keller using Sign Language

**What Makes This Read-Aloud Complex?**

1. **Quantitative Measure**

Go to <http://www.lexile.com/> and enter the title of your read-aloud in the Quick Book Search in the upper right of home page. Most texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.

Most of the texts that we read aloud in K-2 should be in the 2-3 or 4-5 band, more complex than the students can read themselves.

2-3 band 420-820L

4-5 band 740-1010L

830L

1. **Qualitative Features**

Consider the four dimensions of text complexity below. For each dimension, note specific examples from the text that make it more or less complex.

-Letter to his daughters

**Moderately Complex**

-“Have I told you that you are…”

-Synopsis of historical figures

**Slightly Complex**

-Higher Level Vocabulary

**Very Complex**

-Background knowledge of important historical figures

**Very Complex**

**Meaning/Purpose**

**Structure**

**Language**

**Knowledge Demands**

* **Meaning**—moderately complex
  + Letter to his daughters to let them know that everything that these historical figures have put into place is part of what we live by and part of us
  + Simplicity to his questions to his daughters: “Have I told you that…”
  + History shapes who you are, and that you are the future because you will be part of the history someday
  + From the Rubric: levels of meaning
    - Multiple levels of meaning
    - Explicit purpose
      * “Have I told you…”
      * Students will reflect on the explicit questions
* **Structure**—slightly complex
  + “Have I told you how important it is to honor others’ sacrifices?
  + A woman named Maya Lin designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to remember those who gave their lives in the war;

and the Civil Rights Memorial

to thank the many who fought for equality.

Public spaces should be filled with art, she thought,

so that we can walk amidst it,

recalling the past and inspired to fix the future.

* + From the Rubric: Structure is simple
    - Ask a question, answer with a short text (repetitive)
    - Explicit
    - Theme of the text is implicit
    - Illustrations supplemental to the text
* **Language**—very complex
  + Vocab
    - Equality, sacrifice, memorial, inspir[ed] [ing], hope, unyielding compassion, erupted, strides, lunar landing, picket[ed], enslaved, kin, liberty, justice for all, forging ever on, unique, courage
  + From the Rubric:
    - Literal & figurative
      * The hardness of stone and the softness of feather
      * For peace, it is not necessary for eagles to be crows
      * Spirits grow wide
      * Opened hearts
      * Saw the birth of his dream in us
      * Marched for their rights
      * Si se puede! Yes, you can!
      * Asked more of our country
      * Make an idea into a new country
      * A country of principles, a country of citizens
      * People who have made bright lights shine
      * Work and build upon all that is good in our nation
      * You are the future
    - Clear
    - Familiar
    - Half conversational (left page/question), half academic (answer with historic figures)
    - Academic vocabulary
    - Sentence structure
      * The hardness of stone and the softness of feather
      * Turned pictures in his mind into giant advances in science, changing the world with energy and light
      * Medicine man who healed broken hearts and broken promises
      * Though he was put in prison, his spirit soared free on the plains, and his wisdom touched the generations
* **Knowledge**—very complex
  + Background knowledge of important historical figures
    - Helen Keller, **Jane Addams,** Maya Lin, Albert Einstein, Georgia O’Keefe, Jackie Robinson,Sitting Bull, **Billie Holiday**, Cesar Chavez, Neil Armstrong, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln, and George Washington

1. **Reader and Task Considerations**

What will challenge my students most in this text? What supports can I provide?

* + Historical figures shape who we are today
  + We are also the future
    - What are you going to do to impact future generations?
  + Vocabulary
  + Background knowledge of the historical figures

Supports to provide

* + Will the teacher introduce the historical figures prior to reading this text, or throughout the Read Aloud (throughout the week, as an extension of the Read Aloud)
  + Vocabulary
  + **Graphic organizer** (see below)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question (left page)** | **Characteristic** | **Who?** | **What?** |
| Have I told you that you are inspiring? | Inspirational | Cesar Chavez | Picketing for your beliefs  Praying  Talking  Marching for rights  Yes, you can! |

How will this text help my students build knowledge about the world?

* + Various characteristics of people
  + Knowledge of historical figures and their contributions to America
  + How small acts can have a large impact

1. **Grade level**

What grade does this book best belong in?

2nd Grade