1. Dr. Valerie Guyant presents "Everyday Uses for Literature and the Weight They Carry."
2. This OER could be presented in as little as a few days [in a 200 level literature class at the university level] or be extended to a full unit of a few weeks.
3. I have been concerned with high impact practices and strong student engagement in higher education for a number of years. One aspect of student engagement that I think is often lacking in higher education is a strong connection between course work and a student’s own life, a way to connect learning to life. While it is sometimes easier to see how their major may connect to their life goals, it is not always as easy to see how literature might connect to their world. This project is designed to show a direct connection between texts they read and study in the class and some aspect of their own lives, often an aspect that they may not have thought of in these terms [or in any terms] before. It can also, upon occasion, connect literature to personal and family history, which creates a much stronger understanding of the text for the students, but also shows them how literature reflects multiple lives and universal and cultural truths. As the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development emphasizes, strong student engagement requires meeting four goals – success, curiosity, originality, and satisfying relationships. I chose fairly easy to read texts to help foster success in understanding and I ask students to use their own or their family history to also further that goal. The texts include references to historical events and emotions that they may not have thought of before, hopefully inspiring curiosity, and it asks them to learn something from their own family, to seek out their own stories, and to think about their own history in a different way, which also can foster curiosity. Since no one can tell their stories as well as they can, this inspires an original approach and the assignment itself is designed to inspire originality, if the student wishes to approach the writing in a different way than the standard essay format. Finally, by showing interesting in their lives and history and by validating the importance of both in connection with their learning, I hope to build the foundation of a more satisfying relationship with my students. This is one of the reasons why I ordinarily use this assignment near the beginning of a semester.
4. This project is designed for an Introduction to Literature course, although it could be used in other contexts. The readings are all based upon the weight and importance of memory, culture, and family history. As currently taught, the unit engages “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker, a chapter from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien, a story from the collection *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* by W.P. Kinsella, and a section from *Ghost Singer* by Anna Lee Walters. It is important to note that when I first began this project, it was directly connected to only “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker. Over time, I have added other stories as the students responded so well to the initial prompt and I found other stories that would or could engage them on additional levels. “Everyday Use” is focused upon a quilt and whether that family heirloom should be put on display or used for its original purpose, with two daughters disagreeing on that topic. However, the chapter from *The Things They Carried* adds an additional layer of discussion – the physical and psychological weight of memories, war, trauma, and the importance of carrying something that helps maintain a sense of self. Eventually, I also added the first chapter from *Shoeless Joe Jackson* since the main character in the story creates a physical manifestation of his most important family memories – baseball games with his father. I only recently added the excerpt from *Ghost Singer* since it deals with an important family heirloom but adds the layer of attempts at cultural appropriation since others attempt to purchase the dress simply because it is authentic. It is important to note, however, that other stories would also work for this unit, as long as they add to the discussion of personal, familial, and cultural artifacts, heirlooms, and memories. In other words, the prompts and the structure could be applied to other pieces of literature dependent upon the instructor.

The preparatory in-class work for the final project reflects Tharp’s Standards #2 and #5 because it encourages students to “talk about familiar topics” within their homes and communities; it “encourages students to use content vocabulary to express their understanding”; it “provides frequent opportunities for students to interact with each other and with the teacher during activities”; it “arranges the classroom to accommodate conversation between the teacher and a small group of students”; it “designs instructional tasks that advance student understanding to more complex levels” and it “guides conversation to include students’ views, judgments, and rationales, using text evidence and other substantive support.”

The final project requires students to identify a personal or familial artifact [either tangible or intangible] and apply what they have learned from the fiction they have read to an analysis of that artifact. The project requires active discussion with family [and possibly community] in order to understand the history of that artifact and its importance to the student’s own history and future. Since the final project for the unit is a detailed project produced by students, the proposal definitely engages Tharp’s Standard #5 by “guiding the students to prepare a product that indicates the Instructional Conversation’s goal was achieved.” Additionally, the final project for the project/unit meets a number of Tharp’s Standards in #2, #3, #4, and #7. Among them, the project: “assures that students use their expertise and funds of knowledge” to produce their final project; “encourages students’ use of first and second languages” in the production of that project, “assists students to accomplish more complex understanding by relating [content] to their real-life experience” and familial or cultural heritage; “provides opportunities for parents [as well as other family members] to participate” in the learning environment; and “assists students to connect and apply their learning to home and community” as well as culture and history, depending upon how they approach it.

1. Minimal technology is needed for this unit, although use of a Learning Management System (LMS) is useful.
   1. Copies of the four stories involved in the project, of course, either as a handout or online in a LMS.
   2. Examples of some initiating questions for class discussions, but instructors should use students' own ideas and questions first, if possible.
   3. Writing prompt for final project after stories have been discussed in class.
   4. Grading rubric.
   5. Sample student papers – either for student’s benefit or the instructor’s.
2. Learning Objectives/Outcomes: Students should understand aspects of the short story better, of course. However, the learning outcomes I am most hoping to reach with this unit, include:
   1. Students will be able to read and demonstrate good comprehension of the texts.
   2. Students will demonstrate the ability to apply basic research methods in first person research, especially in the form of personal interviews.
   3. Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to evaluate, integrate, and apply appropriate information from various sources to create cohesive, persuasive discussions of a personal artifact.
   4. Students will interpret the stories in the cultural context of the period.
   5. Students will investigate and assess an artifact within cultural and familial contexts.
   6. Students will demonstrate the ability to connect their personal, familial, and/or cultural lives to the texts they read.
3. Assuming that the students already have a background in reading literature and analyzing for elements of literature prior to this unit, the sequence can work in two ways. I usually assign two of the works to be read at once to offer the opportunity for comparisons during discussion, but they could also be assigned one at a time.
   1. For each story, students are asked to write an initial response of 250 words or more that addresses their thoughts, opinions, and analysis of the story, as well as 3-5 questions they have about the story. They are required to use textual evidence for opinions and questions must go beyond what someone can find in the story through careful reading. In other words, I want them to ask questions that engage at a deeper level. Ideally, these are due in advance enough for the instructor to read them prior to class time. I try to have them submitted to our LMS before midnight the night before a class and read them the following morning, but I realize that this is not always an option.
   2. The instructor can read through the responses and select students’ questions to include in the in-class discussion. This adds legitimacy to the students’ ideas and helps them feel more invested in the discussion.
   3. Initial introduction to each story’s context and author should be made by the instructor. Instructor can also discuss literary elements as applicable to the class goals.
   4. Ideally, the sequence would be 1. Instructor introduction 2. Complete class discussion of main points 3. Students split into small groups to discuss additional questions, including those created by students 4. Meet back together as a larger group to share what was discovered 5. Repeat for each story.

Depending on organization, this could take 2-4 days total. At the end of the last day of this type of discussion, create discussion circles for (e) which they will organize and then hold on the next class day(s).

* 1. Have students split in to four groups and hold discussion circles where each has a specific duty [worksheets attached]. Ideally, assign different stories to each group. This is one of the times when access to computers or laptops will be beneficial for the students. One class period [or two if you have time and it is going well] split between discussion in groups and reporting back out to the rest of the class about what they have discovered. If students have not done so yet, this is when I make the connection between the different types of memories and historical artifacts in the stories and their own personal and cultural histories. Usually, students have begun to make those connections to varying degrees at some point [some as early as the initial response, but most during the discussion circles]. They usually have not made them on as deeply personal of a level as the project prompt asks for, however.
  2. Introduce prompt for the final writing project of “Everyday Uses for Literature and the Weight They Carry” [prompt and rubric attached].
  3. Instructor can choose to have students share their projects or display them if the class space permits. However, I strongly suggest offering an opt-out option since these projects can become deeply personal. I have actually found that the projects themselves are of a higher quality when students are not worried about sharing them.

8. Most students seem to accomplish at least part of the outcomes and often express a renewed interest in how literature reflects real life emotional concerns. I continue to adapt which stories students read to reflect the interests of my student population, but “Everyday Use” has always been the backbone of the assignment. Students seem to make real connections to the ways in which literature can reflect their own concerns or get them to think about aspects of their lives on a personal level. They also mention learning more about their own histories than they knew previously. These projects are often longer, more detailed, and exhibit more of a flair for words or creativity than other projects do during the semester. Of course, there is a certain level of hit and miss to the quality and engagement that students display and some students struggle to come up with a subject to write about and investigate. Some students realize that an object or a memory is far more important than they ever considered, while other students struggle to articulate why their families may not have any heirlooms. Some students discuss a personal memento/artifact and its importance rather than a family one, which I encourage. I have also had students discuss the importance of place or of memory or the weight of a memory or of a place and some students discuss all three.

9. I would recommend that the instructor read useful background information on each of the authors and on the works, as well as historical background for the times in which the stories are set, but it is not essential to read specific works or articles. General knowledge of all of these authors and time periods is easily accessible online.

a. “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker is set in the 1970s. Knowledge of the Black Power movement, Black Separatism, and Nation of Islam during the 1970s will be beneficial. Also beneficial is some knowledge of the importance of quilts during the time of the Underground Railroad in the United States during the early-to-mid 19th century.

b. *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien is set during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Knowledge of American involvement in Vietnam as well as anti-war sentiment can be helpful when discussing this text. Also helpful is any general knowledge of Army regulations, behavior, and policy.

c. *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* by W.P. Kinsella was published in 1982 and is set in the late 1970s. However, what is most important for teaching the section here is that the instructor know and share information about the Chicago White Sox’s scandal from 1919. The novel is also the basis for the Kevin Costner film *Field of Dreams* so instructors could discuss film adaptation with it, but that is not covered in this resource.

d. *Ghost Singer* by Anna Lee Walterswas published in 1988 but is set primarily in 1968. Knowledge of museums, and especially of the questionable early acquisition of historical Native American artifacts can be useful when teaching the whole novel but is not essential for this excerpt. Some discussion of Navajo might also benefit instructors.

10. Appendices:

1. “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker [PDF document]
2. Chapter from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien [PDF document]
3. Chapter from *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* by W.P. Kinsella [Word Document]
4. Two chapters from *Ghost Singer* by Anna Lee Walters [PDF document]
5. Example set of student created questions [Word Document]
6. Literary Discussion Circle prompt [Word Document]
7. Project Prompt with Rubric [Word Document}
8. Three articles that helped me decide to explore this method of connecting with students [Two Word Documents and one PDF document]
9. Fourteen examples from pervious students with a variety of focuses [Word Documents]
   1. A Generational Ironing Board
   2. A Gold Vase
   3. A Non-Traditional Tradition
   4. Don’t Quit
   5. Dorothy and Her Paintings
   6. Ford Windstar and a Scar
   7. Importance of a Horshoe
   8. Lane Cedar Chest
   9. Musical Legacy
   10. Painting
   11. Requiem
   12. Thanksmas Bible
   13. The Bed Frame
   14. War Capsule

Please note, I have had students create projects that were more display oriented, but they do not transfer as well electronically. I have included an array of projects that I hope creates a feel for what students can and will do with this prompt.