

**VIDEO**

# Write With. . . Life Stories: I Saw. . . I See with Darren Walker

by 826 National and Life  
Stories

GRADES 9–12

**TYPE**

**POETRY**

In this activity, you will explore your values and the lived experiences that have shaped them, and then write a poem that shares your vision for the future.

**WHAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL LEARN****About [Life Stories](#)**

Life Stories is a 501(c)(3) non-profit media organization that creates and distributes documentaries, interviews, and educational resources about people whose lives inspire meaningful change. These stories address issues of civics, history, politics, the arts and culture by shining the spotlight on relatable human stories of purpose and meaning in times of change. We provide open access to all our content for communities and classrooms through our curated website and YouTube channel.

**About [The Thread](#)**

*The Thread* is a new documentary interview series exploring what it means to live a purpose-driven life through conversations with multi-faceted people who have helped shape our society. Each 30-minute episode takes viewers on a personal journey into the life of extraordinary people who candidly share their triumphs and failures. *The Thread* is available on the Life Stories website and YouTube channel, and as a podcast across all major platforms. Teaching *The*

*Thread* brings the series into the classroom with episode lessons designed to strengthen social emotional learning and media literacy skills and expand the scope of subject matter in Social Studies and English Language Arts. Future seasons of *The Thread* will include similar curricular support.

## WHAT YOU WILL DO

### Introduction:

In this lesson, Darren Walker recalls his childhood in Louisiana and early exposure to the Head Start program, an early education government program, as a life-changing event. He discusses his challenges and choices at the Ford Foundation, highlighting the need to address inequality. Listen to Darren Walker reflect on how his past experiences have shaped who he is, and how they support his vision of the future. Please visit [Darren Walker: Hope and Courage in Action](#) to see the full lesson provided by Life Stories.

### STEP 1

Begin by reading the quote from Darren Walker’s opening of the *The Thread* interview ([6:19–10:37](#)):

“Hope is the oxygen of democracy. When we have more hope, we will have a better democracy. But in order to generate hope, people have to believe in something.”

In your writing journal, take 3–5 minutes to reflect on the meaning of his quote. Consider the following questions:

- What does *hope* mean to you?
- Do you agree or disagree with the quote? Why?

- Do you believe democracy can exist without hope? Why or why not?

## STEP 2

In Darren Walker’s interview, he reflects on key experiences in his early life that were core to his worldviews and values. Watch the sections of the interview in which Walker reflects on his first job as a busboy at a restaurant ([1:42–4:06](#)) and his involvement in the Head Start program ([10:55–12:14](#)).

On page 1 of the [I Saw. . . I See with Darren Walker — Handout](#), jot notes on what Darren Walker learned or took away from each experience and how those learnings connect to his current values.

## STEP 3

Darren Walker shared that, as a busboy, he learned how hierarchies operate. In his job as a dishwasher, he was at the bottom of the restaurant’s hierarchy. He felt invisible—and the nature of the job was that he was *supposed* to be invisible.

Now, in your writing journal, reflect on a time in your life when you have been at the bottom of a hierarchy, or a time when you felt similarly invisible. Think about the following prompts:

- In what ways did you feel “less than” or invisible?
- What words and actions from others made you feel this way?
- Did this feeling, or your hierarchy status, change? In what ways?
- In what ways did you feel hopeful? Or a loss of hope?

## **STEP 4**

Now, find the menu of values on page 2 of the handout. Choose 3–5 words from the chart that you feel most represent who you are and what you care about.

Then, brainstorm a list of ten important experiences you’ve had in your life—such as working as a busboy or attending Head Start programs, like Darren Walker did. You can choose *any* experience (home, family, school, an important “first,” etc.) as long as you learned something from it or it influenced your values. The experiences you wrote about in STEP 3 are a great place to start. Write your list on page 3 of the handout.

Then, place a star next to three of those experiences. These should be the experiences that deeply connect to the values you identified on page 2 of the handout. Add your experiences to the Impact graphic organizer on page 4 of the handout.

## **STEP 5**

On page 4, elaborate on the experiences and values you identified:

- • How does each experience impact the way you *currently see* the world?
- • How does each experience impact the hopes you have for *the future*?

## **STEP 6**

Finally, write a poem that uses the lines “I Saw” and “I See” as a framework for reflecting on your experiences. Feel free to jump right into the writing process, or use the Poem Planning Template on pages 5 and 6 of the handout as a basic guide to help you get started. After you’ve finished planning, craft a full draft of your poem in your writing journal.

### **Writing Tips:**

- Consider alternating “I Saw” and “I See” stanzas, ending with your vision of the future.
- *Show* your reader your life experiences, your values, and your vision by including concrete details and sensory language.
- Poems thrive on sentence fragments, line breaks between words, and repetition, so experiment with your structure.
- Finally, don’t stress if your full draft doesn’t completely align with your template—go with what works for you!

### **MATERIALS**

- “Darren Walker: Hope and Courage in Action” – *The Thread* video
- [I Saw. . . I See with Darren Walker — Handout](#)
  - 1 copy per student
- Writing journal and writing utensil