

## **Darius Goes West “Know About It” Lesson Plan**

**Subject: Language Arts, Humanities,  
Psychology, Social Studies**

**Age Range: 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade**

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### **Hopes and Dreams: The Strengths Based Portfolio**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Many times, people with and without disabilities are viewed from a deficit based perspective. This perspective can be the most limiting thing to a person’s success in school and in the world at large. The Take a Look at Me™ Strengths-Based Portfolio is a dynamic tool of self-discovery that initiates a shift in paradigms from deficiencies to strengths and assets. Through a series of open-ended questions this 20 page book engages individuals in a positive process of self-exploration, empowering the individual to reflect upon and demonstrate the hopes and dreams that are the foundations of building a healthy, well rounded and self-determined life.

#### **LESSON OBJECTIVES**

**Educators will:**

1. Engage students in a positive process that helps to develop an awareness and understanding about individual and peer strengths, interests, culture, and community.
2. Provide students the opportunity to generate their own ideas, identify preferences, and consider choices for the future.
3. Provide students the opportunity to consider who they are in relation to their family and broader community.
4. Incorporate knowledge gleaned from the portfolio process into the curriculum, allowing teachers to celebrate each child’s diversity and enhance the learning opportunities for all children.
5. Promote building supports based on the personal vision and the hopes and dreams of the student.

**Students will:**

1. Become aware of a strengths-based perspective
2. Engage in activities designed to express their unique sense of self
3. Interact with peers and teachers during this self-reflective process
4. Share findings with peers and teachers
5. Discuss what they learned about one another through this sharing
6. Reflect on the importance of hopes and dreams for everyone
7. Contemplate Darius’ story through each part of their own process

#### **MATERIALS/PREPARATION**

1. A Take a Look at Me Portfolio template and/or sample pages
2. Photos and/or camera and access to making prints
3. Markers, colored pencils and other writing tools
4. Stickers
5. Magazines (to cut symbolic pictures from) and other art supplies

## INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

1. Each student will be asked to write a paragraph describing themselves
2. Students will participate in one, several or all of the activities listed below.
3. Students will develop portfolio based activities, portfolio pages or the entire portfolio using class time as well as extra curricular time.
4. Students will share what they learned about one another through this process
5. Students will write a follow-up paragraph about themselves
6. Educators will compare paragraphs to identify if a change in perspective was made

## KEYS TO IMPLEMENTING THE PORTFOLIO

1. The portfolio should be presented as a fun and exciting creative activity for self-expression.
2. Providing materials for the development of the portfolio (i.e. markers, stamps, pictures, etc.) is a good way to encourage the creative process.
3. Breaking the portfolio process down into smaller steps may be important to facilitating the process-- pages are perforated so that 2-3 pages may be torn out at a time.
4. Talk through how an individual could use the portfolio once it is completed. If a person knows who might read the portfolio, they may be more motivated to tell their story (i.e., prospective employers might read it, new teachers might read it, etc.) What would you want to tell these people about yourself?
5. The portfolio is a chance for each individual person to:
  - a. Express themselves the way that they want to be seen
  - b. Let others get to know the person in his/her own words
  - c. Allow a person to think through some questions that you might not have thought about before
  - d. Focus on strengths and interests and provides a platform for dreaming

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

Choose one or more of the following activities or discussions:

### 1) Know About It: An Animated Portfolio:

Before watching *Darius Goes West*, ask students to gather into groups of threes and give them the following brief description about Darius.

*Description: Darius Weems is a fifteen year old young man with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. He has never left his hometown of Athens, GA.*

Show students the movie and lead a discussion about how the documentary (i.e. getting to know Darius) changed or informed their view of what his future will be like. Ask students to think about his strengths, hopes and dreams. Prompt students to answer the following questions:

*What are Darius's unique strengths and interests?*

*What are some of Darius's favorite activities?*

*What are some of his dreams for the future?*

*How could you support Darius to be actively involved in your school activities? In your community? As your friend?*

## 2) Know About You: Attributes and Preferences

Discuss the word "attribute" with your class and develop a list of attributes on chart paper. Continue with this topic by asking students the following questions to contemplate:

*What are you good at? How does it make you feel to be good at something? Do you like to do the things you are good at? When and where do you do those things you are good at?*

Ask students to make a list of 20 things they like to do and think about the last time they did each one and how it made them feel.

Ask students to think about their personal attributes and then have them write a personal advertisement describing who they are for a newspaper as though they were looking for a friend. The ad should be at least 15 words long. Have volunteers share their descriptions.

Continue the discussion by asking students the following questions:

*Now that you know Darius a little bit better, what qualities do you think he looks for in a friend? Do you think based on what you enjoy doing that you and Darius could be friends? What are some of the things that you would do together?*

## 3) Stereotypes and the Unknown

*Introduce this topic by having students contemplate the following:*

*What happens when someone makes a judgment about who you are before they know you? Has that ever happened to you? Think of something that you aren't so good at that and imagine if people only knew you for this rather than for all of the things you can do? How might that make you feel? Think of a situation where you feel that someone has judged you without knowing who you really were. Now fill out the following questions (samples from the portfolio).*

Things that make me feel good about myself...

I keep myself as well and healthy as possible by...

Things that motivate or encourage me...

Some things I am learning right now...

How I learn best...

The perfect job for me would be...

In my lifetime, I want to...

Activity 3) continued: Continue by leading a discussion centered on the following questions:

*Imagine if the person who judged you knew all of the things that you just filled out. How might that have changed your interaction?*

*Do you think that people had judgments about Darius? What type of stereotypes do you think Darius has come up against? What did Darius do when faced with these types of obstacles? What have you learned about yourself from his experience?*

#### 4) Identifying Uniqueness and Building Relationships

A few days before implementing this lesson inform students that they are going to be creating some personal portfolio pages and ask them to bring in photos, magazines or art supplies (outside of the ones you may have in class) to use in making their pages unique.

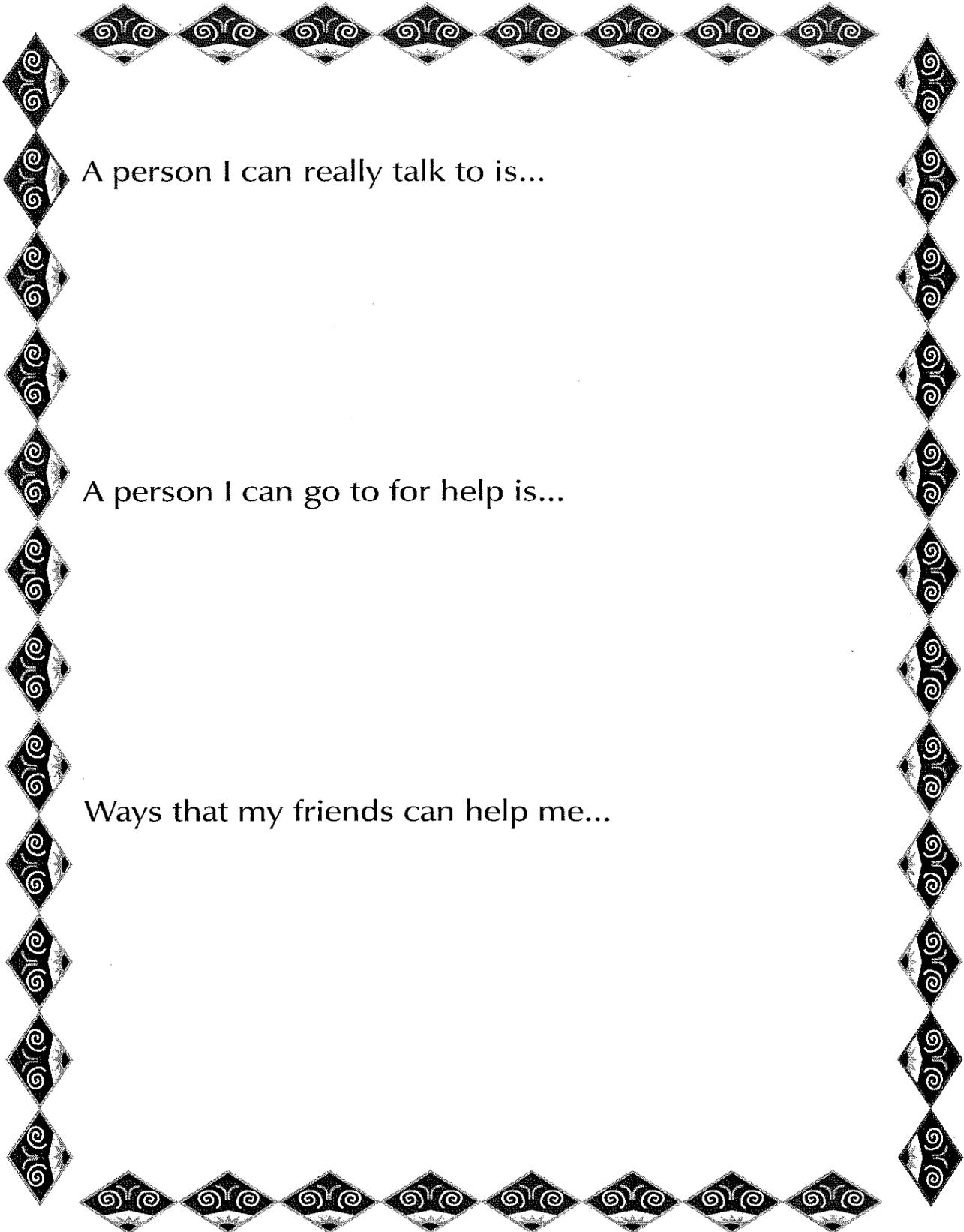
Introduce this topic by having students contemplate the following questions:

*Why are relationships important? How will relationships I build in my life help me in the future? Who can I depend on to help me with my problems? Why is it important to understand how people are alike and different? How can understanding differences in people help me in my life?*

Using the following pages from the Take a Look at Me Portfolio, have students pair up with another person in class (encourage them to work with someone they don't know very well). Pass out the sample pages and give students time to use photos, stickers, drawings, markers, pencils, etc. to design a truly unique picture of who they are. Have students share these pages with their partner and discuss as a larger class what students learned about one another.

Continue the dialogue by discussing the following:

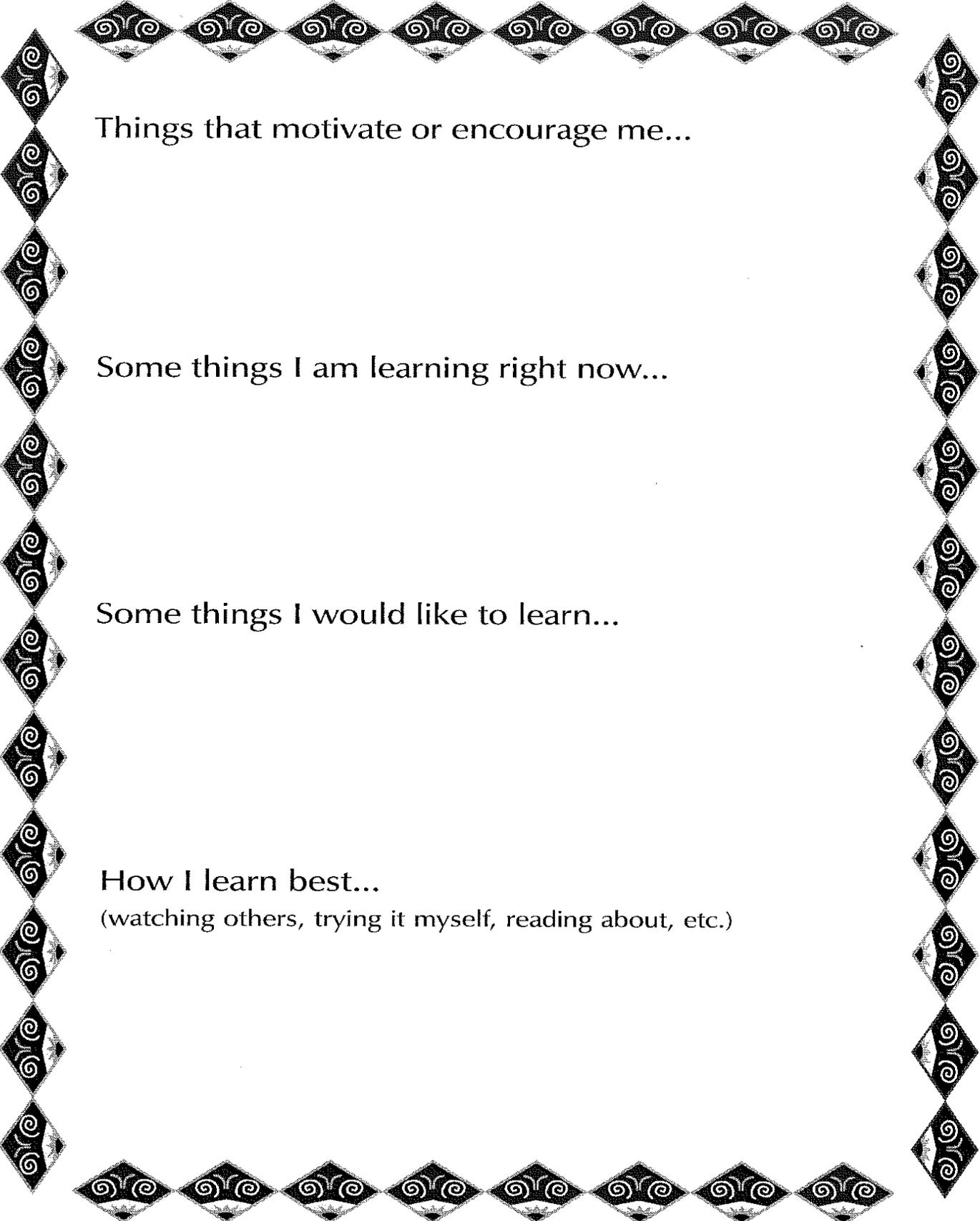
*What relationships were important to Darius? How was Darius supported through his relationships? How did Darius support others? How was Darius similar to and different from the people he met along his journey? What did the people in the film learn through these differences? What did you learn about differences and relationships from DGW?*



A person I can really talk to is...

A person I can go to for help is...

Ways that my friends can help me...



Things that motivate or encourage me...

Some things I am learning right now...

Some things I would like to learn...

How I learn best...

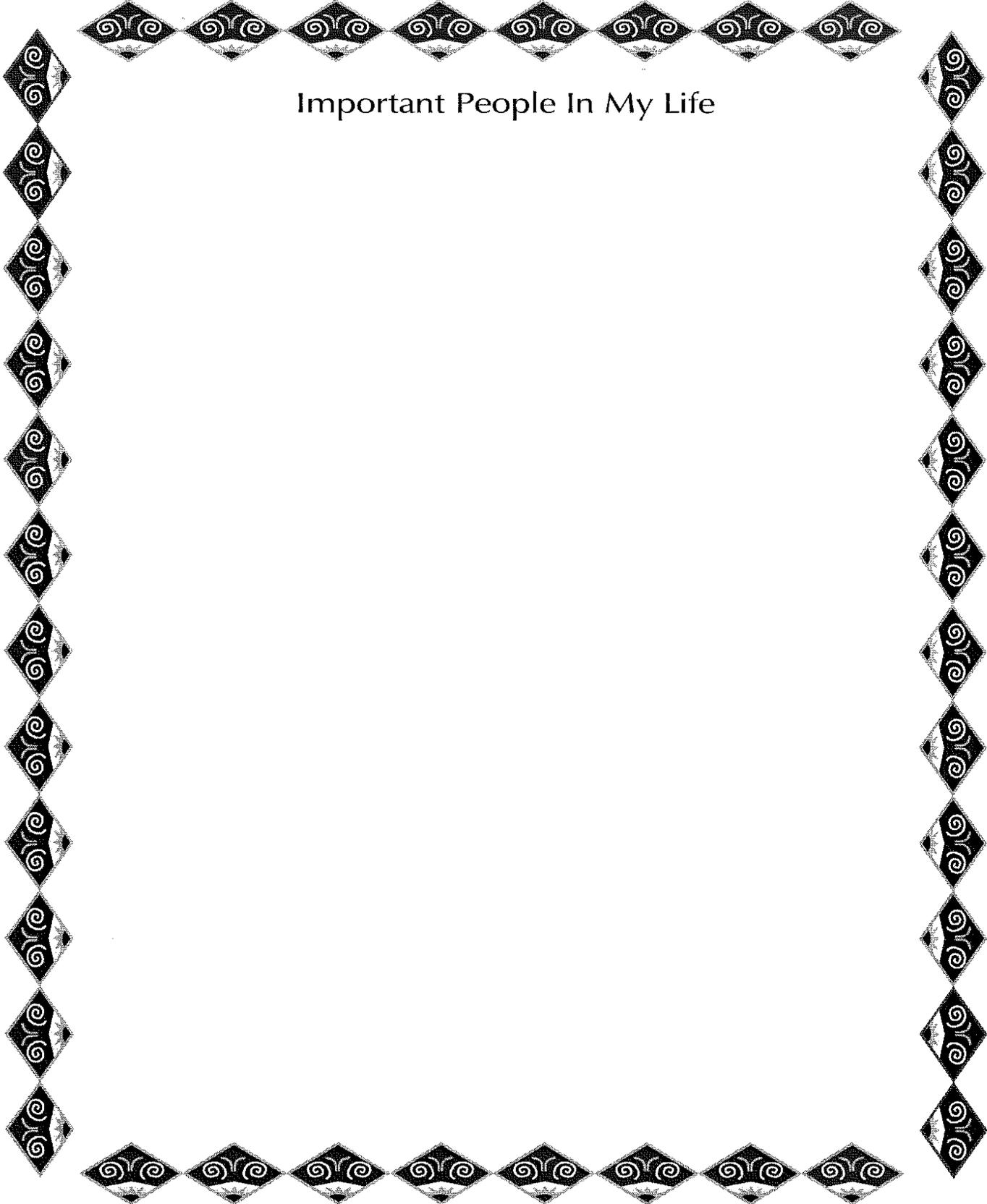
(watching others, trying it myself, reading about, etc.)



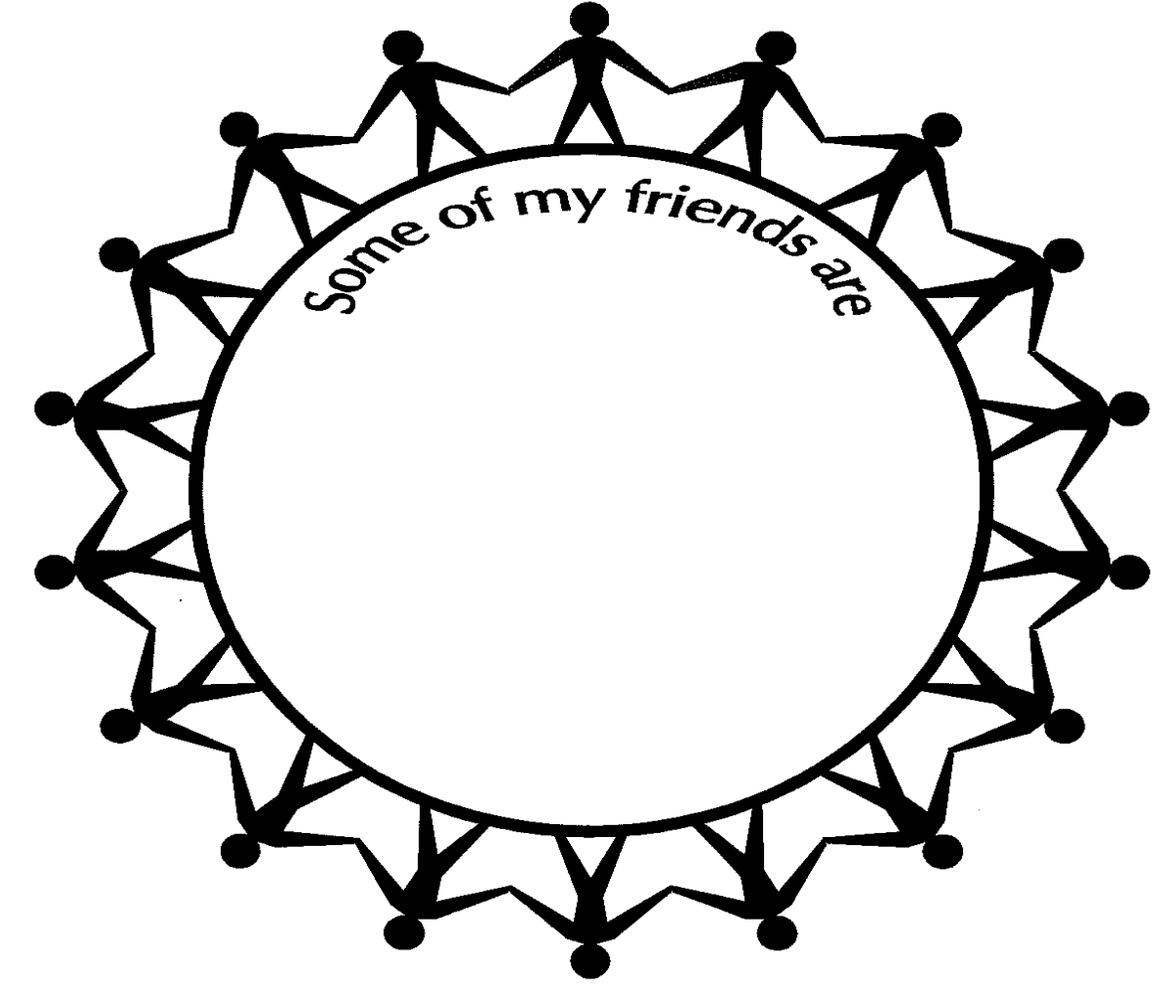
The perfect job for me would be...

In my lifetime, I want to...





## Important People In My Life



Some of my friends are

When with my friends, we like to



## 5) Choices: Using Your Voice

Introduce this topic by having students contemplate the following questions:

*What do I need to know to make a good choice? What should I do if I am in a bad situation? When should I encourage a friend to make a good choice? Who will help me make good choices?*

Have a discussion on values, trust and feeling secure. *How can making good choices enhance self-determination? What is the difference between informed, uninformed, coerced and self-motivated choices? Have students share examples of each from their own experience.*

Discuss necessary steps in problem solving: **Gathering Information, Defining the Problem, Developing Solutions, Considering the Consequences, Making a Decision, Evaluating the Solution**

Have students break into small groups and discuss or role play the following scenarios.

You are at the mall with your friends and one of them shoplifts and encourages you to do the same.

You've been planning on going to a friend's party, when at the last minute, your mom decides that you can't go, but she's going out for the evening.

You decide to go hear a band play with some friends, one of them uses a wheel chair. When you get to the venue, there is no accessibility ramp.

One of your friends has been asked to read aloud in class. He has a hard time pronouncing several words. Many of the students in class laugh at him.

You are friends with a student that most of your friends think is "different". You are in the hallway hanging out with a group of your friends when this student walks by and invites you to have lunch.

After 20 minutes students return to the large group and discuss which scenarios were most challenging and what they learned about themselves from this process.

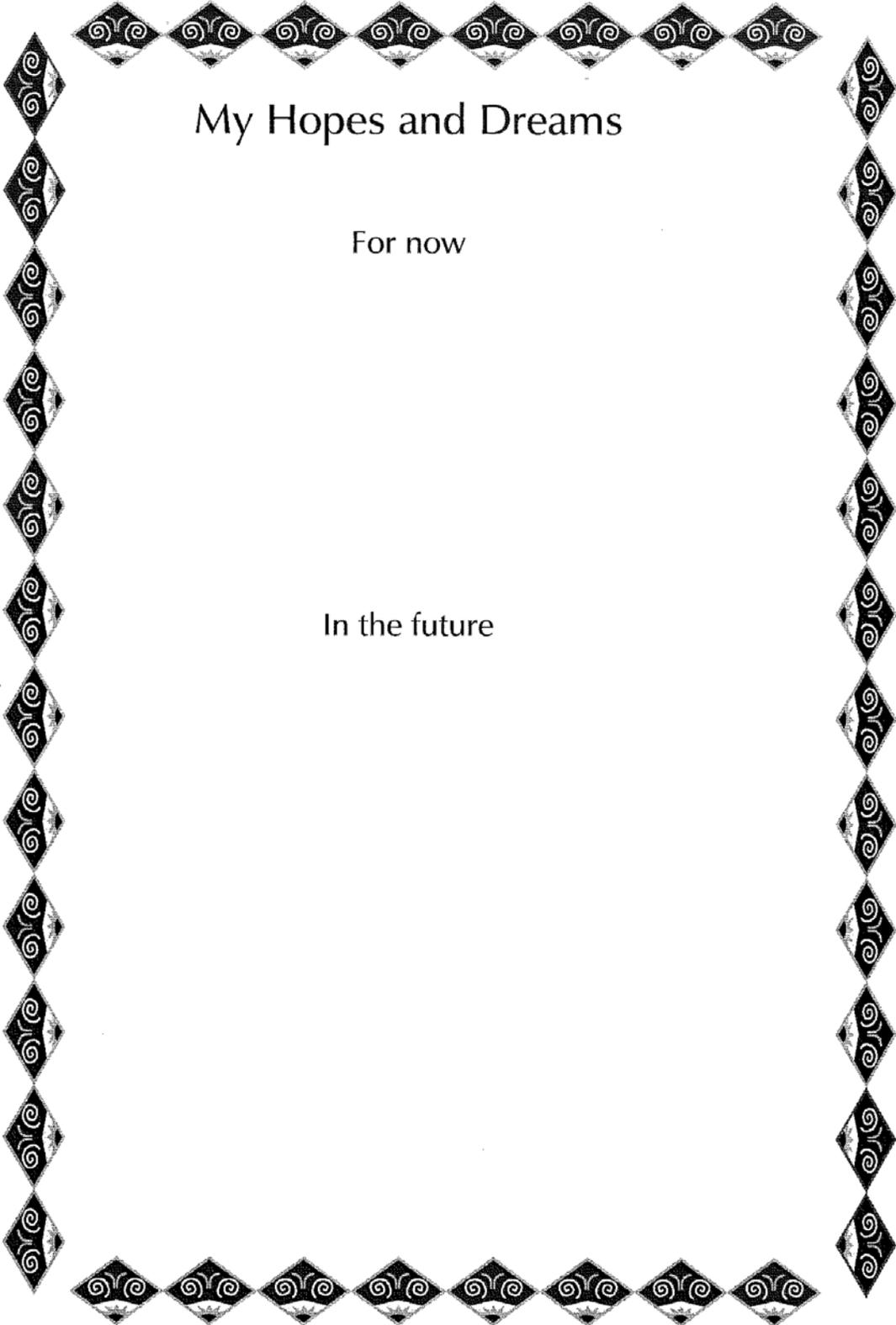
Continue the discussion by contemplating the following: **What were some of the hard choices Darius had to make along his journey? When did he have to use his voice? How did the people around him react? What did you learn about Darius through the choices he made? Would you ever make a choice to leave home and travel the country? If so, what challenges might you face?**

## 6) Hopes and Dreams:

Introduce this topic by having students contemplate the following:

**Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? What is it that you'd really like to do this year? Now? What are the hopes and dreams that you've always had? Have any of those come into being?**

Pass out the following page from the portfolio on Hopes and Dreams and allow students class time to make it their own. Ask for volunteers to share their pages.



# My Hopes and Dreams

For now

In the future

Continue the discussion with the following questions: What was Darius' dream? How did he go about making that happen? How were his relationships with others important? What dreams do you have that will require the support of other people?

7) **The complete Strengths-Based Portfolio:**

You can order the complete portfolio online at [www.takealookatmeportfolio.com](http://www.takealookatmeportfolio.com) soon to be [www.strengthsbased.com](http://www.strengthsbased.com); you can also give us a call at 706-542-3960. In addition to the portfolio, we have a kit that you can purchase which includes a camera, markers, glue stick, some funky scissors and other fun accessories.

Once you have the portfolios, prepare students for their creation by giving them ample time to collect meaningful photographs and other imagery that they'd like to include to personalize their portfolio.

Use the guidelines for implementing the portfolio discussed in the introduction and let the students go to work. Remind them of how much they learned about Darius through his documentary (i.e. animated portfolio), and encourage them to make something equally telling about who they are as individuals. Our website includes examples of portfolios as well. You can see them at:

<http://www.takealookatmeportfolio.com/samples.html>

## **RESOURCES**

[www.takealookatmeportfolio.com](http://www.takealookatmeportfolio.com)

[www.strengthsbased.com](http://www.strengthsbased.com)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Mary E. Rugg, M.Ed., the Early Intervention Program Coordinator at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at the University of Georgia, has worked for over 30 years training educators, providers and families to create inclusive communities. Currently, she travels state and nationwide to introduce a strengths-based portfolio.

Janelle Railey, LPC has over 10 years experience working with families, children and adolescents in diverse therapeutic capacities, and demonstrates an interest in utilizing the strengths-based portfolio as a diagnostic tool.