



*What do you want, and how can you put it into words?*

# Creating a Personal Manifesto

## Background Information

Octavia Estelle Butler was born in Pasadena, California in 1947. As the first science fiction writer to be awarded the MacArthur Fellowship, and the first Black woman to enter the predominantly White and male world of science fiction, Butler's pursuit of a writing career required her to traverse many uncharted waters.

Butler responded to her own self-doubt by writing affirmations and notes of encouragement to herself. Often written on scrap paper or, in the case of the manifesto showcased in this lesson, on the back of notebooks, these positive messages follow the loose organizational structure characteristic of Butler's notes. The format of this manifesto was likely inspired by the self-help books Butler read in her early years.

Butler published twelve novels and a collection of short stories. She is best known for her critically-acclaimed novel *Kindred*, which takes place in both 1970s Altadena, California and the antebellum South and explores topics of race, power, and our relationship with the past. She is the recipient of both the Hugo and the Nebula Awards.

Her untimely death at age 58 shocked and devastated members of the science fiction community. Butler and her work continue to influence writers and readers around the globe. Contemporary writers have published multiple anthologies, containing both stories and essays, in her memory. At The Huntington Library, scholars continue to learn about her work and her life through the study of the Octavia E. Butler Papers.

## Lesson Description

Students will study the personal manifesto of Octavia E. Butler and create a personal manifesto of their own.

Grade Range: 9-12

Time to complete lesson: 3-5 hours (can be completed across multiple class periods)

Resources needed:

- ◇ Student materials (provided at the end of this document)
- ◇ Construction paper
- ◇ Art





By the end of this lesson, students will **know:**

- Writers enhance their work through the use of literary/poetic devices
- Writers enhance their work through revision and peer-feedback
- Writing is a skill that can be learned
- Octavia Butler used writing to respond to the challenges she faced

By the end of this lesson, students will **be able to:**

- Write a short personal manifesto inspired by Butler’s “I shall be a bestselling writer” that makes use of literary/poetic devices
- Respond to someone else’s personal manifesto, drawing connections to their life and values
- Provide peer feedback to others and incorporate peer feedback into their own writing

## Standards

### Common Core State Standards– English Language Arts

CCSA.ELA-LITERACY.W9-10.5

CCSA.ELA-LITERACY.W11-12.5

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.A

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.

### California English Language Development Standards

ELD.PI.9-10.1 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.11-12.1 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.9-10.2 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.11-12.2 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.9-10.8 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI. 11-12.8 Emerging-Bridging





# Activity #1

## Connect

1. Students circulate in pairs through a gallery of 5-6 quotations from Octavia Butler (page 9), both from interviews and from some of her novels/short stories
2. While walking, students will complete a SAY-MEAN-MATTER graphic organizer (page 5) for the quotations
3. After returning to their seats, each table group will be asked to compare notes on a specific quotation and be ready to share out their SAY-MEAN-MATTER
4. While each group shares out, the class will add to their own notes about each quote
5. Students will be asked to respond verbally (in pairs, then by volunteering to share whole-class) to the question, “What experiences, values, and priorities drove Octavia Butler’s work?”

## Activate

1. Project an image of Butler’s “I shall be a bestselling writer” manifesto, and distribute paper copies to each pair
2. Select a volunteer student to read the manifesto out loud, slowly and clearly (alternatively, teacher can read it out loud to maximize conviction/effect)
3. Direct students to annotate the manifesto in pairs, using the worksheet (page 6). They should specifically look for more responses to the question from the last activity, “What experiences, values, and priorities drove Octavia Butler’s work?”
4. Cold call or take volunteers to share responses whole-class

Stretch Tasks: While annotating, look for literary/poetic devices in the manifesto

Scaffolding: Challenging vocabulary has been defined in the Vocabulary List (Page 4). You can highlight student copies of Octavia Butler’s manifesto to alert students to the words defined in the Vocabulary List

## Demonstrate

1. Teacher brings students’ attention back to one of the original gallery walk quotes: “What we don’t see we assume can’t be.” Tell students they are going to work at breaking these assumptions, and to envision their ideal futures even if they don’t already see them in the world, or as accessible



2. Students write a rough draft of their own manifestos, using the structure of Butler's manifesto as a guide

Stretch Tasks: Include literary/poetic devices (repetition, metaphor, etc...) in the manifesto

Scaffolding: Sentence starters/template for writing personal manifesto (page 8)

### Consolidate

1. Students participate in a peer feedback protocol, in which each manifesto rough draft is rotated for feedback to three different students (three rounds)
2. Students make revisions to their manifesto rough drafts, based on peer feedback
3. Students make final drafts of their manifestos with construction paper and other art supplies, designed to be posted on classroom bulletin boards (and perhaps shared out/presented to the whole class)



<b>Vocabulary List</b>	
<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
<b>Clarion</b>	A science fiction Writers Workshop (class for people who want to become better writers)
<b>High Advance</b>	An advance is money the publisher pays to authors before the book is published.
<b>Imago</b>	A book written by Octavia Butler and published in 1989
<b>LAT</b>	Los Angeles Times newspaper
<b>Manifesto</b>	A declaration (stating) of values, ideas, priorities, and goals
<b>NYT</b>	New York Times newspaper
<b>Octavia Butler</b>	A science fiction writer who changed the way a lot of people think about science fiction. Because she was the first Black woman to write science fiction professionally, she faced a lot of challenges.
<b>Publisher</b>	A person or company that pays an author to publish their work
<b>PW</b>	Publishers Weekly magazine
<b>WP</b>	Washington Post newspaper



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### SAY

What does the text **say**? In each box in this column, write an important **quote** or part of a quote.

### MEAN

What does the quote **mean**? Use your own words to describe what the author is saying.

### MATTER

Why does what the author is saying **matter**? Explain why you chose this quote, and what it makes you think and feel.


Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_



Annotate: Respond to Octavia Butler's personal manifesto. Use the blank space on this page to write your comments. Keep our question in mind: **What experiences, values, and priorities drove Octavia Butler's work?**

I shall be a bestselling writer.  
After Imago, each of my books  
will be on the bestseller lists of  
LAT, NYT, PW, WP, ~~etc.~~, etc.  
My novels will go onto the above lists  
whether publishers push them hard or not,  
whether I'm paid a high advance or not,  
whether I ever win another award or not.  
This is my life. I write bestselling  
novels. My novels go onto the bestseller lists  
on or shortly after publication. My novels  
each travel up to the top of the bestseller  
lists and they reach the top and they stay  
on top for months (at least two). Each of my  
novels does this. So be it! I will find the way  
See to it! to do this.  
So be it! See to it!

My books will be read by millions of people.  
I will buy a beautiful home in an excellent neighborhood  
I will send poor black youngsters to Clarion or other writer's workshops  
I will help poor black youngsters broaden their horizons  
I will help poor black youngsters go to college  
I will get the best of health care for my mother and myself  
I will hire a car whenever I want or need to.  
I will travel whenever and wherever in the world that I choose.

My books will be read by millions of people!  
So be it! See to it!



I shall be a bestselling writer.

After *Imago*, each of my books will be on the bestseller lists of LAT, NYT, PW, WP, ~~etc.~~, etc.

My novels will go onto the above lists whether publishers push them hard or not, whether I'm paid a high advance or not, whether I ever win another award or not.

This is my life. I write bestselling novels. My novels go onto the bestseller lists on or shortly after publication. My novels each travel up to the top of the bestseller lists and they reach the top and they stay on top for months (at least two). Each of my novels does this. So be it! See to it! I will find the way to do this. So be it! See to it!

My books will be read by millions of people.  
I will buy a beautiful home in an excellent neighborhood  
I will send poor black youngsters to Clarion or other writer's workshops  
I will help poor black youngsters broaden their horizons  
I will help poor black youngsters go to college  
I will get the best of health care for my mother and myself  
I will hire a car whenever I want or need to.  
I will travel whenever and wherever in the world that I choose.  
My books will be read by millions of people!  
So be it! See to it!



## Sentence Frames

I Shall be a...

My work will ...

Whether or not \_\_\_\_\_ happens, I will accomplish my goals.

This is my life. I...

I will buy...

I will help...

I will get...

I will...

I will...

I will...

...So be it! See to it!



The following pages include the quotes used in the Connecting Activity. Choose 5-7 to post around your classroom.

Be sure to include the first quote “What we don’t see, we assume can’t be,” as it is referenced in the lesson.

**“What we  
don’t see,  
we assume  
can’t be”**

- Octavia E. Butler

“I had a lot of  
empathy, and  
hurting someone  
really bothered  
me”

- Octavia E. Butler

“I began writ-  
ing about pow-  
er because I  
had so little.”

- Octavia E. Butler

**“I just knew  
there were  
stories I want-  
ed to tell.”**

- Octavia E. Butler

I sort out my  
problems by  
writing about  
them.

- Octavia E. Butler

**“Every story I  
create, creates  
me. I write to  
create myself.”**

- Octavia E. Butler

**“ I don't know  
any black wom-  
en who write  
science fiction ”**

- Octavia E. Butler

**“Your writing is an  
expression of your  
inner feelings and  
thoughts and be-  
liefs and self”**

**- Octavia E. Butler**

**“I did all sorts of  
work... It was a  
matter of pay-  
ing the rent”**

- Octavia E. Butler

“I see science fiction  
as a way of dissemi-  
nating the fact that we  
don't have only one  
kind of people, namely  
white males, in this  
world”

- Octavia E. Butler

Whether I write journal  
pages, an essay, a short  
story, or weave my prob-  
lems into a novel, I find  
the writing helps me get  
through the trouble and  
on with my life.

- Octavia E. Butler

“To study history is to study humanity. And to try to foretell the future without studying history is like trying to learn to read without bothering to learn the alphabet.”

- Octavia E. Butler

“First forget inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not. Habit will help you finish and polish your stories. Inspiration won’t. Habit is persistence in practice. You don’t start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it’s good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it. That’s why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence.”

- Octavia E. Butler

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“I'm a 48-year-old writer who can re-member being a 10-year-old writer and who expects someday to be an 80-year-old writer. I'm also comfortably asocial -- a hermit in the middle of Los Angeles -- a pessimist if I'm not careful, a feminist, a Black, a former Baptist, an oil-and-water combination of ambition, laziness, insecurity, certainty, and drive.”

- Octavia E. Butler

“Writing is difficult. You do it all alone without encouragement and without any certainty that you'll ever be published or paid or even that you'll be able to finish the particular work you've begun. It isn't easy to persist amid all that. [...] Sometimes when I'm interviewed, the interviewer either compliments me on my 'talent', my 'gift' or asks me how I discovered it. [...] I used to struggle to answer this politely, to explain that I didn't believe much in writing talent. People who want to write either do it or they don't. At last I began to say that my most important talent - or habit - was persistence.

- Octavia E. Butler