Writing

Personal Narratives

By Kristen Nunns & Lisa Smith
Preface

Personal narratives are a good place to start teaching writing, especially if you have a group of reluctant learners. Who doesn’t want to talk about themselves? Personal narratives allow students to choose a moment in time that is important to them and “explode the moment.” In this ebook, you will find strategies for introducing and teaching personal narratives to a wide range of students.

Throughout the iBook you will see this icon which indicates the inclusion of an **I.S.L.E.S.** Instructional Strategy.

**Common Core Standards Addressed:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5**
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6**
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1**
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2**
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1**
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Language Objectives:

Students will learn to use imagery in their personal narratives.
In general, students like to write about themselves and their lives. **Personal narratives** allow students to do this, while also allowing you as a teacher to get to know your students better as both people and writers. However, don’t assume that students know what a personal narrative is, how to organize one, or how to choose a topic. You should walk them through each step.

First, introduce them to the idea of a narrative by having them write a journal entry about a specific event defined by you. You can find sample prompts in the box to the left. In the beginning, students should only have a short amount of time to write (5-10 minutes) so that they don’t get overwhelmed by details. Once they do the initial writing, it is easier to have them go back and revise or add to the writing. After students complete the journal writing, a review of imagery is a good next step. Many students will come to your class knowing imagery, but others will not and even if they do know what imagery is, many students struggle with how to integrate it into their writing.

Students need to be reminded that imagery is not just about an image, but also about what the reader can taste, touch, smell, and hear. At this time, providing students with a sample text can be beneficial. The possible sample texts are endless, but
Choose one which is engaging for students and rich in imagery. Read through the text with students once, and then ask them to identify examples of good imagery.

After students analyze the sample text(s) for words or phrases that contain imagery, take the time to explicitly teach how to create imagery in their own writing. You may do this using several activities such as the blindfold activity or the analyzing a photographs activity described below.

The blindfold activity consists of separating students into different stations. At each station, there should be objects for the students to analyze using each specific sense separately (touch, taste, smell, hearing) while blindfolded. They should work in pairs so that the blindfolded student has a partner to record the descriptions on a Tree Map Thinking Map®. After one student has analyzed an object using his senses, the students should switch jobs so that the other student has an opportunity to analyze a different object and the partner records. Tell students that for each sense, they should tell their partner words or phrases describing the object. For example, if the blindfolded student is using the sense of touch and feeling a square of velvet, they may choose to use words like smooth or soft to describe it.

Another good mini-lesson to teach imagery is analysis of a photograph. This can be done in several ways. You can provide each student with their own photograph (this can be an advertising photograph, piece of art, or simply a photograph) or you can choose one photograph to project for all students to analyze. Either way, each student needs to draw a Circle Map® with a Frame of Reference® around it; they should draw the circle so that it takes up most of the picture. They will need five different colored pens, pencils, markers, etc. to record each sense in a different color. Direct students to only focus on one sense at a time until exhaustion. Then after a predetermined amount of time (i.e. one minute), allow them to move on to the next sense until all the senses are accounted for. Remember to remind the students to change colors when they change senses. In the Frame of Reference, students should record which color represents each sense.

Once students have explored imagery with one or both of these activities, ask them to revise their original journal writing to include imagery.
Chapter 2

Characteristics of the Personal Narrative

Language Objectives:
Students will identify the characteristics of a personal narrative.
Section 1

Teaching the Characteristics of a Personal Narrative

Use the video at right to introduce students to the characteristics of a personal narrative. In this video, the characteristics are presented then a song is used to explain those characteristics more in depth. The characteristics are listed for you in the text box below, as well.

While the video is playing, ask students to take notes on the six characteristics. After watching the video, engage students in a discussion of those traits, asking them to explain those traits to you verbally. Invite students to find a song they are familiar

Interactive 2.1 Characteristics of a Personal Narrative

You Tube video outlining the characteristics of a personal narrative in songs.

Characteristics to Use in Your Personal Narrative
1. First Person Point of View
2. Dialogue
3. Action
4. Focus/Purpose
5. Imagery and Details
6. So What?

Things to Avoid:
• Too Much Information!
• The “Alarm Clock” Story—we don’t need every detail of the day. Only the important details need to be included.
with that they believe is a personal narrative. They should provide the lyrics and an analysis of that song using the six characteristics of a personal narrative. This allows you to assess which students understand the characteristics and which need more instruction.

Question 1 of 4
Which best defines personal narrative?

- A. a story told in third person
- B. a story told about you, by you (Correct)
- C. an autobiography
- D. a lengthy, detailed description of an event
Personal Narrative Assignment

Language Objectives:

Students will write a “This I Believe” personal narrative.
National Public Radio (NPR) produces an essay series entitled “This I Believe” which supports the idea of a personal narrative. This essay series asks everyday people to examine their personal beliefs and tell the story of how they discovered that belief. The essays are very short at 500 words but are rich in the characteristics of a personal narrative; specific essay guidelines are given on NPR’s website. NPR publishes both the essay and an audio recording of the essay on their website. Using some of these essays as text exemplars for students gives them an idea of what to include in their own essay. NPR also produces a free weekly podcast which can be subscribed to and used for updated essays.

Use the essays published on NPR’s website to reinforce the six characteristics of a personal narrative. Ask students to analyze how well contributing writers fulfill those characteristics in their essays. Perhaps, begin by providing texts chosen by you for analysis. After you and students review 1-2 texts as a class, allow students to explore more essays by theme. Ask students to analyze 1-2 essays on their own and turn in an informal analysis for you to ascertain their level of understanding of the characteristics once again.

Once students have explored some of the essays by theme, they should begin to examine their own beliefs and attempt to explain their beliefs in writing. For many students, this can be the most difficult part of the writing process, and the use of a Thinking Map®, such as a Circle Map®, could be beneficial for the writing process. First, students should list the things or ideas that they feel strongly about. Once they have created...
this list, students should examine which belief is the “strongest” or allows for the most development into an essay.

For students who finish their essay early or who need an extension activity, direct them to submit their essay to NPR and record an audio file of themselves reading their essays. The audio file will have to be submitted to the teacher, but the finished essay may be submitted to NPR’s website. Students may use any audio recording program available to them at home or school and submit the audio file to you in any way that you prefer.

If a student is under eighteen years of age, he or she must have parent or guardian permission to submit their essay. This may be done in the form of a parent letter which requests permission for the student to submit their essay; NPR requires that a parent/guardian name and email address be provided for anyone under eighteen. Please note that NPR does not accept submissions from anyone under twelve years of age.

You can access lesson plans, worksheets, podcasts, and more that you can use to support this assignment at the links below.

NPR: “This I Believe” Sample High School Writing Curriculum
“This I Believe” Sample Middle School Writing Curriculum
Read-Write-Think: Giving Voice to Students Through “This I Believe” Podcasts
Read-Write-Think: Two Belief Statements worksheet
Read-Write-Think: “This I Believe” Podcast Rubric
Language Objectives:

Students will revise and edit their personal narratives.
Revision is an important step in the writing process which is often skipped by students. For this reason, it is important to build in and take time for revision step in class.

Students should begin the revision process with a self-review in which they use the following questions to evaluate their personal narrative. These questions should help students to evaluate their writing and where they need to refocus or revise:

• Does your essay tell a story? What is the story?
• Is your belief clearly stated in a sentence or two? What is the belief?
• Does your essay have sufficient details and imagery? How do you know? Provide textual evidence.
• Does the essay meet the list of characteristics for a personal narrative?
After students complete their self-review, they should use a Flee Map® to deconstruct their essay. This allows students to break apart their essays and be sure each section of the essay is fully fleshed out and divided equally.

The next step in the revision process should be peer revision. Students should be paired by the teacher in groups of 2-3 depending on the number of students in class. Consider ability levels when pairing group members. Within these groups, students should silently read each other’s essay(s) and answer the same questions that they answered in their self-evaluation (see questions previously stated). Students should not be allowed to speak to each other for clarification during the reading of their essay since the essay needs to be clear without input from the writer. If the reader cannot fully answer the evaluation questions, the writer knows they have much more revision to do to be sure their writing is clear.

After this step is completed, students should read their essay to a peer while the peer attempts to draw the images created in the essay. This allows the students to evaluate whether the imagery within the essay is strong or still needs work. Students drawings do not have to be original masterpieces of art, but should be conscientiously done for the benefit of the writer.
Section 2

Editing

Editing is different from revision in that it focuses solely on grammar and mechanics, while revision focuses on content, structure, word choice, etc.

Pair students in small groups again, considering ability levels, and provide them with a peer editing rubric. Again, do not allow students to ask each other for clarification while reading their essays. Students should thoroughly complete the rubric and use a highlighter, pen, or pencils to mark areas of concern on their peer’s essay.

The Hemingway App is a free resource online that can help students edit their writing. They can simply copy and paste their text into the app and it will evaluate their writing in several areas such as grade level readability, sentences which are hard to read or very hard to read, use of adverbs, passive voice, and words or phrases that could be simpler.

Another good resource for a free online editing tool is the SAS Writing Reviser. This tool does require a login, but once the login is created, students may use the reviser at any time, as much as they want, and they can save their work. The SAS Writing Reviser utilizes an exhaustive list of grammar and mechanics to evaluate writing. It will alert students when they have an issue with grammar/mechanics and provide lessons on those issues. The student can then use the information in the lesson to help them edit their writing.
Chapter 5

Resources
References and Resources

NPR: http://www.npr.org/

Thinking Maps® are copyrighted material. You can get more information about maps and training at: http://thinkingmaps.com/

Read-Write-Think: http://www.readwritethink.org/

I.S.L.E.S.: http://www.ecu.edu/cs-educ/SecondaryISLES/InstructionalStrategies.cfm

This I Believe: http://thisibelieve.org/

YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTVWUKBjp10

Hemingway App: http://www.hemingwayapp.com/

SAS Writing Reviser: http://www.sascurriculumpathways.com/portal/Launch?id=4003

OWL: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/
I.S.L.E.S.

Instructional Strategy Lessons for Educators Series: part of the TQP (Teacher Quality Partnership) grant at East Carolina University.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Preface - Preface
Personal narratives

According to the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University, a personal narrative is an essay that is anecdotal, experiential, and personal—allowing students to express themselves in a creative and, quite often, moving way.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Find Term

Chapter 1 - Journal Writing & Imagery Activities