



PERSONAL NARRATIVES TO EXPLORE FAMILY AND LEARN MORE ABOUT ONE ANOTHER

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 3 – 6

LENGTH OF TIME: Four to five 30 – 40 minute sessions plus homework time

GOAL

- To develop writing skills through personal narratives.

OBJECTIVES

- To use descriptive language to form engaging images while writing.
- To build community in the classroom through sharing important stories in students' lives.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. (Also 3.3, 5.3 and 6.3)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 (3, 5 or 6) topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also 3.1, 5.1 and 6.1)
- Social Studies Strand 4: Individual Development and Identity – examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development, and actions including family, peers, culture, and institutional influences.

EDUCATORS' NOTES

“We teach them that their lives and their thoughts are worth writing about. We help children realize that the small moments of their lives can be compelling stories, and we help them feel committed to capturing the truth of their experience in words.”

– Lucy Calkins, Director, Teachers College Reading and Writing Project

In this lesson, students use writing workshop time to develop personal narratives. This helps them see that their lives are important and it can be a way to share their lives with each other and build community in your classroom. It can help students see similarities with each other while also sharing something personal about themselves that makes them who they are as a unique person.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Paper, pencils
- Writer's notebook or journal

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL NARRATIVES.

- Think of a person who matters to you, someone who has cared for you or helped you. It could be a parent, a stepparent, grandparent, sibling, neighbor, friend or foster parent. Think about some small, clear moments that you remember with them.
- Think of a place that matters to you—past or present—examples might include the place where you live, a special room, a caring person’s place where they live, or a place in nature that you share with a special person. Think of some clear small moments that you remember happening in that place. Think of things that could show why it matters to you.
- Think of a special time that you have had with your family or an important person in your life. Think of some specific times you remember.
- Think of a celebration that you have had with your family—a holiday, a birthday. Think about special moments that happened that show why that time was important to you. (Having students write about celebrations related to holidays can bring up discussions among students about religion. Be prepared to facilitate these discussions in an inclusive way and answer questions respectfully.)

PREWRITING

- Active Engagement: Have the students turn and talk to a partner about the topic that you will be asking them to write about. Have them talk about some details that would help their partner understand it more or picture it better—actions, thoughts, dialogue.
- Ask students to choose one specific moment to write more about that shows why that person, that special time, that celebration matters to them. Ask them to think about creating a movie in their mind about that moment. Tell us a story about that moment. Prompt them to use all of their senses as they think about that moment.
- Then have them write in their notebook a list or notes about the ideas that they have for the topic. Or, if you have been using different brainframe formats, they could use one of those to begin to write down their ideas.

INDEPENDENT WRITING TIME AND CONFERENCING

- As students start their first draft, remind students to show don’t tell. Talk to them about making movies in their mind and then writing so their readers can picture exactly what happened.
- Conference with individuals or groups of students as the class is working on their independent writing. Ask the students what they are trying to do with their writing, what they’ve done so far, and what they plan to do next. Give them some praise for what they have done well and then help them think about what they need to be working on with their writing.

REVISING ESSAYS – MAKING IT SOUND RIGHT

- Have students pair up or work in small groups to read each other’s writing. Is the writing clear? Does the other student have questions about what was written? Ask students to look for where there could be more detail or descriptive words. As the other student to ask questions, the writer may get some new ideas for their writing. Have the writer try to explain to the reader what they were really trying to say or what is at the heart of their story? Then, allow time for students to make revisions – adding, elaborating, deleting, combining, or rearranging text.

EDITING / PROOFREADING ESSAYS – MAKING IT LOOK RIGHT

- Editing involves checking for effective use of words and phrases, spelling of grade-appropriate words, capitalization, and punctuation. You can also have students check for complete sentences. Are there inappropriate fragments or really long run-on sentences?

PUBLISHING AND SHARING ESSAYS

- Have students create a final copy, handwritten or on a computer. Writers share what they have written with an audience beyond the teacher and celebrate their growing accomplishments as writers.

DISCUSSION

- What are some new things that you learned about your classmates?
- Did you find any connections with others that you hadn’t known about before.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- These will vary based on grade level of the students. This may also change if you are working with students on a particular skill such as good leads or vivid descriptions that really show the moment. The assessment could include:
 - Structure of the essay – introduction or lead, sequencing, conclusion.
 - Word choice – descriptive words, figurative language, images created.
 - Writing conventions – grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON WRITING WORKSHOPS

[Teachers College Reading and Writing Project](#)

[What Is Writing Workshop?](#) WeAreTeachers.com

DIVERSE AND UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

[Lesson Plans to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Children’s Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Katharine Pillsbury, MBA