

Guidelines and Resources for Teaching Narrative Writing

A narrative in its most basic form is a story. Indeed, the act of telling stories is a powerful way for people to reflect, connect, and find meaning. Narrative writing is not only an excellent means for students to refine their composition skills, but also serves as a powerful transition into other forms of writing.

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<p>The Narrative is a powerful form of writing that is used to communicate a message, cultivate emotional connections, guide a story, and lay the foundation for another writing genre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal narratives not only tell a story but also have a purpose: sharing a lesson learned, a moment of realization, or a memorable experience in someone’s life. ● Narratives are a powerful tool for reflection and even healing. ● Because narrative topics often require less research, students have an opportunity to focus on the act of writing. Consider the following ideas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide thought provoking prompts: <i>Write about a moment when you learned something or experienced something that changed the way you saw yourself, someone else, and/or the world in which you live.</i> ○ Provide examples of these types of events: driving for the first time as a licensed driver, getting caught cheating on an assignment, staying home alone for the first time, losing a loved one, winning a tournament, etc. These can even be moments that at the time didn’t seem important, but upon reflection, had a significant impact on the students. Once students determine what that moment is they need to plan how they might organize the details of the event as organization and structure matter greatly in narrative writing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ They could begin by stating what they learned and then tell what led up to that moment. ■ They could move through the event chronologically. ○ Ask students to plan the writing of their experience with a plot map, storyboard, or other planning tools (see below). 	<p>500 Prompts for Narrative and Personal Writing from the NY Times</p> <p>Narrative Essays from Purdue's OWL</p> <p>Rhetorical Situation Slideshow</p> <p>The Rhetorical Situation Interactive Classroom Activity</p> <p>Tone and Mood Videos</p> <p>Sample Narratives</p> <p>Student Writing Samples</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Likewise, using descriptive language to “show” rather than “tell” is important in narrative writing (see below), so students need practice with this skill. ○ Note that many writing experts suggest that it is a good idea for the teacher to consider telling one of his or her own life changing experiences and then writing the narrative along with the students. ○ Asking students to be vulnerable in their writing requires feelings of trust and safety and teachers need to establish such an environment from day one. Doing the assignment along with the students helps establish that trust and safety. ○ As always, study and discuss several models of narrative writing with the class. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Look specifically at first and last lines. ■ Discuss how the narratives are organized and what transitional language is used to move through the story. ■ Identify descriptive language. Find examples of “showing” by the use of visual imagery. ■ Discuss tone (the author’s attitude towards the subject) and what words are used to convey tone. (i.e. “We were herded into the auditorium.” vs. “We gathered in the auditorium.”) ● Narratives serve a valuable purpose in and of themselves for upper grades as well. They provide a means to refine writing skills unlike other genres. Furthermore, narrative writing provides a pathway for both expository and argumentative writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider asking students to first write about a personal connection (narrative) to a real issue that has affected them such as teen violence, isolating technology, bullying, cheating, etc. ○ Next ask students write a letter (expository) to younger students about 	<p>Plot Map</p> <p>Narratives and comics</p> <p>Write the World (Publishing Site for Young Writers)</p>

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	<p>what they should know about the topic before they attend or intern at their school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finally, have students create a school wide awareness campaign (argumentative) with essays, blog posts or pamphlets that not only provide information about, but possible solutions to, the issue at their school. ● As the rhetorical situation for each piece changes (specifically the audience and purpose for writing), the students will still have that powerful personal connection and engagement with the topic that fuels less personal pieces. 	
<p>Ideas generated through journaling, brainstorming, quick writes, and illustrations provide purpose, direction, and story details for writers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journaling is a meaningful way to help students recall and reflect about an experience. In addition, Journaling helps students to explore details and questions about a new idea or concept in an unstructured and safe place. Journals likewise provide a safe place to experiment with new writing strategies and hone writing skills. ● Prompts can range from quick writes such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Record one new idea you learned from today's lesson. Then, record a question you have about today's lesson.</i> ○ <i>Or Write down a list of everything you know about lighting,</i> to more in-depth prompts such as <i>List and discuss situations that require compassion with action.</i> ● Journal prompts might range from asking students to explore their favorite things about time with their friends, to responding to a question about a text that the class just read, to imagining what it would be like to live on the Mars. The first journal prompt is a great warm up to journal writing in the first few days of school. ● Consider the following journal prompts and what they might yield from students: 	<p>How to Use Journals in the Elementary and Middle School Classroom</p> <p>Quick Writes Description</p> <p>Six Ways to Use Quick Writes to Promote Learning</p> <p>Quick Writes from the University of West Virginia</p> <p>180 Daily Journal Prompts for</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Think of a time when you experienced a powerful emotion. Describe that moment in 100 words or less. No fluff--just show it through your words.</i> ○ <i>Write about feet--The good, the bad, the ugly. Feet.</i> ○ <i>Write about a time you found something.</i> ○ <i>Write about a time when you lost something.</i> ○ <i>Describe yourself in third person at the moment when you opened a gift that you didn't really want.</i> ● Another type of journaling that helps students generate potential ideas is the double-entry journal. This can follow a variety of formats but the basic structure is that the page is divided in half with the left side stating a problem or fact or an event and the right side listing the writer's solution or reaction or feelings about what is written on the left. This practice helps the writer separate the factual details from his or her reaction, feelings, or ideas about them. ● Observation entries are also an excellent way for students to practice writing simply and concisely about what they observe in a sequence. For example, consider asking students to write about the state of their backpack over the course of a week, or about the growth of a planted seed, or the interactions of students at the same table in the lunchroom for a week. ● Journaling works best if it is done regularly in a classroom setting and students are asked to transform some of their journal entries into a piece of writing to publish as an essay, story, or class blog entry. ● Teachers need to have a clear purpose for journaling in their classroom as it takes time and so must be meaningful. Consider some of the following questions about implementing journal writing in the classroom: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Will the students' journals be graded and if so, how? 	<p>Elementary Students</p> <p>30 Descriptive Writing Prompts to Teach Kids About Storytelling</p> <p>75 Journal Prompts for Middle School students</p> <p>Journal Topics from Read, Write, Heal</p> <p>500 prompts for narrative writing</p> <p>Facilitating Brainstorming in the Classroom</p> <p>Teaching and Learning with Brainstorming</p> <p>Kidblog.org</p> <p>Storyboardthat.com</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How and when will students share their entries? ○ How frequently will students write in the journals? ○ What sorts of things are students expected to write in their journals? ○ How will journaling align with our CCSS goals in the classroom? ○ How will journaling directly relate to lesson content and final products students create? ● Illustration in a journal or as a storyboard is an especially effective way for many students to reflect, recall and explore experiences. It is likewise excellent for students to create more elaborate details in their written narratives. Abundant research supports the idea of illustration as a planning tool for writing. Teachers should never discourage drawing as a means of generating ideas in any age student. ● Brainstorming in the journal is also a useful way to generate, organize, and record ideas, whether students do this individually or record the group’s ideas. ● Struggling writers benefit greatly through journal writing as a safe, unedited space in which they can explore their ideas. 	
<p>Struggling writers may need specific directions and strategies to write their narratives successfully.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The pre-writing stage is especially important for students who struggle. Spend time helping students to generate and refine their ideas visually by using crayons, markers, paint, clay or other tools that help them generate their thoughts. ● Help students understand that narratives tend to focus on some meaningful event that is typically brief in the time in which it occurs. Some teachers call it “writing small” or even “thinking small to write big” so that the reader is right there feeling and seeing what the writer experienced in the moment he or she is describing. ● All students benefit from practice in writing small. An excellent way to practice writing small is to have students practice retelling scenes from 	<p>Plot Map</p> <p>Graphic Organizers for Personal Narratives</p> <p>Speech Recognition Software for Learning</p> <p>Speech Recognition Software Links</p>

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	<p>films. Use a website such as Teach with Movies for suggestions for great scenes to have students watch and then retell in their own words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Struggling students also benefit from specific question prompts to organize their narrative ideas. These sorts of questions may include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who is the main character in your story? ○ Who else is in the story? ○ Where does the story take place? ○ When does the story take place? ○ What is the problem that the main character faces? ○ How does the main character feel about that problem? ○ How does the main character overcome or deal with that problem? ○ What does the main character learn from the experience? ● Graphic organizers such a plot maps also help students focus on the important events in their narrative that give the story direction and cohesion. ● Focused practice on sentence structures specific to the sequencing of narratives as well as practice combining simple sentences into complex ones help students who struggle with writing create coherent sentences. Examples of these types of sentences follow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transitional sentences that convey the passing of time ○ Simple dialogue structure and punctuation rules ○ Descriptive sentences that “show” the idea rather than “tell” it ● Struggling students also benefit from voice to text (or speech recognition) software to record their ideas verbally and then go back and edit them. ● Interacting with sample narratives as models helps all students, and especially struggling writers. ● The revision stage is also important for struggling writers. Having peers 	<p>Using Voice Recognition with Students with Learning Disabilities</p> <p>Writing Fix Story Starters</p> <p>100+ Ideas About Sentence Starters on Pinterest</p> <p>Personal Narrative Writing on Pinterest</p> <p>Narrative Peer Editing Checklist</p> <p>Self and Peer Editing Checklist</p> <p>Teachwithmovies.org</p>

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	<p>read and make comments is a practical use of time and worthwhile exercise for students in writing workshops, but for struggling writers, this can be a painful and even embarrassing experience. Teachers need to be sensitive to students' needs and pair them with other students who will be patient and kind. Teachers may consider conferencing with struggling writers prior to having a peer editing session.</p>	
<p>A narrative-style research report can be an effective means for students to transition from subjective to objective writing by asking them to create a fact-based story while adding in creative and visual details.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompts for narrative research should require students to conduct research in order to include factual details in their composition. • Using texts that blend facts and fiction and specifically asking students to identify the fact and the fiction in the text, will help students understand the structure and content of the narrative-style research report. 	<p>Narrative Research in Secondary Levels</p>
<p>Description is an important component to narrative writing. Students need focused practice on honing their descriptive writing skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and writing word pictures is an effective strategy to help students improve their skills in descriptive writing. • Emphasize the idea that students need to show, not just tell, the details by using visual imagery. A description such as “She was sad” will work in some instances, but ask students to <i>show how</i> she was sad by describing large eyes filling with tears or a furrowed brow, etc. • Consider providing a set of four or five similar photographs for students to describe. Assign different students to describe different photos as visually as possible so that everyone writes a descriptive paragraph for at least one photo. Then mix up their descriptions and challenge the class to match the descriptions to the photographs. 	<p>Descriptive Writing from Reading Rockets</p> <p>Descriptive Writing Organization and Structure</p> <p>30+ Ideas for Teaching Writing from National Writing Project</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask students to write a word picture about a moment from their own life experience in 70 words or less. ● Identify visual descriptions in the texts that the class reads collectively. Discuss how and why the author might describe the image in such a way. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What do we learn about the character based on this description? ○ What is the author trying to convey through the details that are included about this place? ○ What feelings might be invoked in a reader through reading this description? ● Challenge the students to change that description. For example, if a room in the text is described to convey the inhabitant's poverty, ask students to change the description to convey the wealth and opulence of a character. Or, if the description of a character is meant to identify him or her as an ally to the protagonist, ask the students to rewrite that character's description to identify him or her as a threat. 	

Additional Links for Narrative Writing

<http://www.huensd.k12.ca.us/page/304a8909-7e73-4aee-8d4d-fb8b7ee46fc1>

<http://educationnext.org/the-lucy-calkins-project/>

http://essayinfo.com/essays/narrative_essay.php

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2014/03/graphic-organizers-personal-narratives>

<https://www.writinga-z.com/main/WritingTeacher/View/Narrative>

<http://www.roanestate.edu/owl/describe.html>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Narrative-Essay>

http://web.gccaz.edu/~mdinchak/101online_new/assignment3writing.htm

<http://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/narrative-essays/>

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