Look at Our Past Through a Writer’s Eyes

1. Focus

Introduce Personal Narrative Writing

Display a photograph (or an object) that represents an event in your past that you are willing to share with your students. Use the sample think-aloud below as a model of how to talk to students about the memory associated with your photograph or object. You may wish to share more than one example with students.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I want to share a memory with you from my past. This memory goes way back to my childhood. I was looking at old photographs, and I came across this one of me with my grandma, and I remembered the day it was taken. Now, what you should know is that my grandma was a very special person in my life. I spent a lot of time with her while my mother was working. She would always let me hop on her lap, and she would read me books. But in this photograph, I was reading her a book. She’d read it to me many times, and I had learned how to read it on my own, and I still remember how proud I was reading her this story. When my mom came home that day, my grandma said, “Well, we have a big announcement to make. There’s a new reader in this house, and her name is ______.”

Say: The memory I just shared is one of my personal stories. I have many personal stories. And you all have stories like that, too. Everyone has stories about themselves. Sometimes we tell people our stories—the way I just told you mine—and sometimes we write them down. The stories we write about our own lives are called personal narratives. For the next several weeks, we are going to read, write, and share personal narratives with each other. We will tell about our own lives in our own voices, and we will express many different ideas and feelings in our writing.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Personal Narratives

Say: You may ask yourself, “Why do people write personal narratives? Who would ever want to read about me?” Well, I write personal narratives because I get to know myself better through the process. I remember interesting details about my past that I had forgotten. I imagine that my audience are people I want to know me better. Did you know that when you apply to a college, the people at the college will want you to write a narrative so that they can get to know you better? We write personal narratives to share who we are and what experiences are meaningful to us.
2. Rehearse

Practice Telling Personal Stories Orally

Invite students to work with a partner. Each student should tell their partner a personal story based on a photograph or object they share. The partner listening to the personal story should be prepared to retell it to the class. Students should explain how the object or photograph helped them remember details to tell their partner.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Personal Stories With the Class

Invite volunteers to retell the stories their partners shared with them. Ask them to tell how their partners used their photograph or object as a memory aid. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in a discussion about the exercise.

Storyteller
• How did you feel as you were telling your partner your story?
• Why did you choose the story you chose? What made you want to tell that story?

Listener
• How did you feel as you listened to your partner tell the story?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Our lives are a series of events, some small and some large. Many events have happened to you already in your lives, and you can write about them. Photographs and objects can help you remember some of these events. In the next several weeks, we will look at more photographs to help us remember events to write about.

Invite students to draw and write about an event in their life.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share the event they wrote about.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners. Encourage them to describe their photograph in any way they can—with words or gestures. Expand on their ideas with simple sentences. Use self-stick notes to label the images in their photographs.

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice. Write simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to talk about their photograph or object. For example:

This ______ shows ______.
I remember ______.

Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: memories/las memorias, narrative/la narrativa, photographs/las fotografías.

Use the images provided on the interactive whiteboard resources as additional visual prompts for telling personal stories.