First and Third Person Narrative Voice

1. Focus

Explain First and Third Person Narrative Voice

Say: Today I’m going to talk about one of the most important elements of a realistic fiction story: the voice of the narrator. The narrator is the voice, or character, that tells the story. When we write fiction, we need to make a decision about the voice, or point of view, that we use. A first person voice is the voice of a character in the story. First person narration uses pronouns such as I, me, mine, and my. A third person voice is the voice of someone outside the story. Third person narration uses pronouns such as he, she, him, her, them, and they. I’m going to read parts of two realistic fiction stories, and I want you to listen to the voice of the narrator in each story. One story is told by a first person narrator. The other story is told by a third person narrator. I’m going to show you the differences between them so that you can decide which kind of narrator to use in your own realistic fiction story.

Model First and Third Person Narrative Voice

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

1. I walked a little way down the sand, looking for my dog. I saw a red-haired boy building a sand castle. I asked if he had seen a Jack Russell terrier chasing a gull.

2. “Where is Jamal,” Brooke wondered. She and the other kids always walked home together. But today, Jamal was nowhere in sight.”

Modeling Text

After example 1. Say: The narrator uses the word I to talk about himself, and he says my dog. He describes what he sees happening. The author writes this story through the voice of a boy. She uses the boy’s voice to tell what happens. This is a first person voice. Once the writer decides on first person, she needs to make sure to create a voice that sounds like a real boy.

After example 2. Say: In this example, I notice that the narrator does not use the words I or we to tell the story. The writer of this example decides to have a narrator outside the story tell what happens. So she makes the narrator of this story talk about the characters by using their names, for example, Brooke, and by using words like she to refer to Brooke. I know that this narrator is not a character in the story and is using third person pronouns to talk about the characters.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn the difference between a first person narrator and a third person narrator.
- Practice writing in first and third person.
- Discuss how to approach point of view in their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text on chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames and idea bank from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.
2. Rehearse

Practice Writing First and Third Person Narrative Voice

Invite students to work with a partner to write two sentences—one in first person and the other in third person—about a single event that might happen at a school. Write first person and third person pronouns on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard for students to refer to. Remind students to be aware that when they write in first person, they must become the character who is speaking and write in a voice that sounds like the character. Remind them that they are not part of the story when they use third person.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite pairs to read aloud their sentences and explain the differences between the two versions of the event. Record students’ first and third person sentences on a two-column chart labeled “First Person” and “Third Person,” and post the chart as a model for students to use as they write their own realistic fiction stories.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Ask students to role-play actions such as writing, reading, and eating. Use the following sentence frames to support students as they tell what they are doing or what another student is doing:

I ______. He ______. She ______.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the practice activity. Provide the following sentence frames and idea bank for students to use as they create their sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Person</th>
<th>Third Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to _____</td>
<td>We like to _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My favorite thing _____</td>
<td>The students _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They like to _____</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Idea Bank

• go out for recess • read • work on the computer • practice math
• go to gym class • sing • draw • eat lunch

All Levels

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share the following English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: character/el carácter; narrator/el narrador/la narradora; voice/la voz.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Remember that when you write a realistic fiction story, you must choose a narrator for your story. The narrator can be a character in the story who uses the first person pronoun I to tell the story. Or the narrator can be outside the story and use third person pronouns such as he, she, him, and her to describe what is happening to the characters. It’s important to be consistent when you use voice, and when you write in first person, you must make the person telling the story sound like a real person. As you write your realistic fiction story, remember to select a narrative voice that is either first person or third person.

Encourage students to apply their understanding of voice during independent writing time, as appropriate. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to discuss why they’ve chosen to tell their stories using first or third person narrative voice.