1. Focus

Introduce the Mentor Memoir

Say: An effective tool for honing our memoir writing skills is to read and listen to memoirs and note their features and strengths. Today I’m going to read aloud a memoir written by a man named Angelo Manuel Parra Sr. As I read Angelo’s story, pay attention to some key features that are common to the genre of memoir. You will include these features in your memoir when you write it.

Read aloud the title of the selection on page 8 of the mentor text. You may also wish to display the text using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Say: The title of this memoir is “From Puerto Rico, 1937.” How was 1937 different from today? How do you think those differences might affect the events in this memoir? Allow students to share their thoughts and predictions.

If your class includes English learners or other students who would benefit from vocabulary and oral language development to comprehend the memoir, use “Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs.”

Read Aloud the Mentor Memoir

Read aloud the text, stopping at some or all of the places indicated (or at other points you choose) to highlight four key features of a memoir:
1. Memoirs are written in the first person.
2. Memoirs include dialogue.
3. Memoirs include the author’s thoughts and feelings.
4. A memoir includes a strong ending that makes the reader think.

First Person narration

After reading page 9. Say: The author uses the pronouns I, me, and we to tell his story. This first person narration helps me see each of these moments in the author’s life through his eyes. As I read, I put myself in his place. Even though in my life a couple of pennies is not much money, I can really feel how much he and his brother wanted them!

Use of Dialogue

Page 11, after fifth paragraph. Say: It’s difficult to remember exactly what someone said six weeks ago, so it must be almost impossible to remember what was said six decades ago! But, even though the dialogue that the author includes may not be exactly what was spoken, the fact that he includes it lets me know that the ideas it expresses are important to the author.
Author’s Thoughts and Feelings
Page 13, after first full paragraph. Say: The author shares his feelings directly with the readers when he says, “I felt lonelier than I had ever felt in my life.” I can imagine how he felt facing a classroom of strangers, all speaking a language he didn’t understand, and without the support of his big brother. Knowing how sad he felt makes me want to find out if his feelings changed.

Strong Ending that Makes the Reader Think
After reading page 15. Say: Wow. I thought this memoir was just about the author’s experiences moving from Puerto Rico to New York. I wasn’t expecting him to reflect on his relationship with his mother. I like how he used his mature point of view of today to look back and sympathize with how hard it must have been for her to leave her children. This ending makes me think about how difficult circumstances can change relationships forever.

2. Rehearse

Respond Orally to the Mentor Memoir
After reading, invite students to share their personal reactions to the text by asking questions such as:
• What feelings or experiences in the memoir could you relate to?
• What did you find particularly interesting in this memoir? Why?
• Did you like this memoir? Why or why not?

Model the following sentence frames to support ELs and struggling students:
• I have also felt ______. I have also experienced ______.
• I found ______ interesting because ______.
• I liked this memoir because ______.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just witnessed how a memoir uses first person narration and dialogue to tell about the author’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences during an important period in his life. The strong ending in this memoir made us think beyond the details of the events and helped us understand the author better. Including these features in your own memoirs will help you tell your story and engage your readers.

Invite students to write a paragraph describing a connection they made to the mentor memoir. Students may make a text-to-self, text-to-world, or text-to-text connection.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share the connections they made to the memoir.

Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs

Beginning
Point to and read the title of the memoir “From Puerto Rico, 1937.” Show students Puerto Rico on a map or globe. Then point to New York City. On the map or globe, trace the route from Puerto Rico to New York City to demonstrate moving “from” Puerto Rico.

Beginning and Intermediate
Say: This memoir is about a boy who left Puerto Rico and moved to New York City. This happened a long time ago.

Intermediate and Advanced
Display the book using the interactive whiteboard resources or hold open the book to note details about the way Puerto Rico and New York City looked during the time period of the memoir. Look at the photograph of the cobblestoned street on pages 8–9. Ask: What do you see? Do you see cars? Do you see people? Does it look like today or long ago? Why? (Then look at the photograph of the subway tracks on page 11.) What do you see? Do you see cars? Do you see people? Does it look like today or long ago? Why? Encourage a conversation to build vocabulary and background information.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: divorced/divorciado(a); electricity/la electricidad; elevated/elevado(a); language/el lenguaje; voyage/el viaje.