Select a Narrative Point of View

1. Focus

Explain the Choice Between First and Third Person Voices

Say: When I write a historical fiction story, I must select a narrative voice to tell the story. Will I tell the story in the first person—from the point of view of one of the characters in the story? Or will I use a third person narrator who is outside the story? To decide which type of narrative voice is right for my story, I ask myself these questions:

• How closely do I want the audience to follow my main character’s experience?
• How many important characters are there in the story?
• Do I want the audience to be able to get inside the head of more than one character?

If I want the audience to follow one character’s experience and see all the events through that character’s eyes, then I choose a first person narrator. If I want to tell more about different characters, then I use a third person narrative voice.

Model How a Writer Selects a Narrative Voice

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for narrative voice as you read the text aloud.

Mery opened her eyes, blinking in the dim light. Across the room, her eighteen-year-old brother’s sleeping mat was empty.

“He’s taken a water skin, a lamp, and some tools,” Grandmother wailed. “I think he’s on his way to Hawara.”

Mery was immediately on her feet.

Modeling Text

Say: When I read, “Mery opened her eyes,” I begin to think that the narrative voice uses the third person, but that I will get inside at least one character’s head. The writer does not say, “I opened my eyes,” so it is not a first person story, but we are still provided this particular character’s perspective. The next sentence confirms this, as the writer shows me the room as Mery sees it: “Across the room, her eighteen-year-old brother’s sleeping mat was empty.” Grandmother is also an important character in this scene, but the narrative point of view continues to follow Mery’s actions, as shown in the final sentence: “Mery was immediately on her feet.” The writer has chosen to use a third person voice that allows us to know Mery’s thoughts, but not to be limited to this one perspective.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using First and Third Person Voices

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

Mery and Khaba hurried over the sand and rock toward home.

Ask students to work with partners and write three sentences in the third person that imagine what happened when the characters returned home to their grandmother and explained—or avoided explaining—their adventure. Ask them to then write about the same event in the first person, using either Mery or Khaba as the first person narrator. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain the differences in the sentences based on the two narrative voices.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain the differences between telling the story in first person and third person. Use students’ examples to demonstrate aspects of first and third person narration. Encourage discussion about the choice between voices with these questions:

- Which version of the story did you like better? Why?
- How would you decide whether to use the first person or third person voice in a story?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that a writer of historical fiction makes a decision about which narrative voice to use—third person or first person—based on various considerations about the characters and the story events. As you write your historical fiction story, decide whether one character or an outside narrator will tell it.

Encourage students to experiment with first and third person narrative voices. Ask them to write a paragraph for their historical fiction stories using each narrative voice. 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 share the paragraphs in which they experimented with narrative voice. Ask students to discuss how this helped them decide in which voice to write their stories.

Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Help beginning ELs with descriptions of simple actions using the first person and third person. Perform a simple action and then describe it in the first person, emphasizing the pronoun I. For example, jump in the air, Say: I jump. Then ask a student to perform the same action and model a third person sentence. Say: She jumps. Ask students to work with partners to first perform an action themselves and describe it; then describe their partner doing the same thing. Provide the following sentence frames:

I ______.
He ______.
She ______.

**Intermediate and 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: narrative/la narración; person/la persona; voice/la voz.