Look at Our Pasts Through a Writer’s Eyes

1. Focus

Introduce Personal Narrative Writing

Display a drawing or illustration that represents your experience during a memorable misadventure 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 event you have illustrated. You may wish to share more than one example.

Sample think-aloud. Say: Look at these drawings I made. This is the cool lighthouse at the beach where we used to go when I was a child. And that’s me in this other drawing. Why am I lying on the floor at the base of a ladder, looking shocked? Well, when I was eight, I climbed up the ladder inside that lighthouse, all the way to the observation room at the top. When I wasn’t watching where I was stepping, I fell through the trapdoor in the floor and landed hard, flat on my back, on the floor below. I look shocked because the wind was knocked out of me. Once I got my breath back, I cried. It turned out I wasn’t hurt very badly, but I was embarrassed. Later, when I thought about how I must have looked with my eyes open wide as I tried to take a breath, I was able to laugh at myself. I drew the lighthouse and the look on my face because they are the parts of the story that remind me of how I felt—excited about the lighthouse, and shocked and silly when I fell.

Say: A misadventure is an accident or unlucky event. That story is one of my most memorable misadventures—an incident that I’ll never forget. Even though it was scary at the time, it taught me to be more careful and to have a sense of humor about myself. It’s just one of the stories from my life that I might write as a personal narrative. Personal narratives are the stories from our lives that we write to share with others. For the next several weeks, we are going to read, write, and share our personal narratives.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Personal Narratives

Ask: Why should we write personal narratives? Well, I write personal narratives so that I can share my experiences with people that I want to make a connection with. There are many people who can understand how I felt in that lighthouse. I could publish that narrative in the school newsletter or on the school website and make a connection with an entire community of readers. Some readers may have also had scary and embarrassing experiences. My personal narrative could show the readers that their experiences, thoughts, and feelings are not unusual. When you write your personal narrative, keep your classmates in mind, because they will be your audience.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, teachers will:

- Launch the personal narrative unit of study.
- Establish themselves as personal narrative writing mentors by sharing a memorable misadventure.
- Model how writers use the experiences in their lives to generate ideas.

Students will:

- Use drawings and/or illustrations to make connections to their past experiences during a memorable misadventure.
- Share memories of a misadventure with a partner and discuss the process with the whole class.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Drawings and/or illustrations that represent memories, feelings, and experiences during a misadventure
- Self-stick notes
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

During the modeling portion of this lesson, use drawings and/or illustrations to show scenes from a memorable misadventure you experienced to model making connections to your personal stories. During the practice portion, students will need at least one drawing and/or illustration with which to share their own stories.
2. Rehearse

Practice Telling Personal Stories Orally

Invite students to work with a partner. Students should share with their partners a drawing or illustration that shows what happened during their own memorable misadventures. The partner listening to the personal story should be prepared to retell it to the class. Students should explain why they illustrated those particular moments.

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 why their partners illustrated those particular moments. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in a discussion.

Storyteller
• How did you feel as you told your personal story?
• Why did you choose that story to tell?
• Why did you illustrate that scene?

Listener
• What did you feel while you listened to your partner’s story?
• What did the illustration tell you about what your partner thinks is important about his or her story?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Today we learned that personal narratives are stories we can write about the memorable incidents in our lives. Drawing or illustrating those incidents is a good way to help us focus on the important moments in those experiences. In the next several weeks, we will continue to draw and illustrate the important moments in the memorable misadventures we want to write about.

During independent writing time, encourage students to create an illustration of a pleasant memory, such as a camping trip or birthday party.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to tell about the memories that their illustrations are based on.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners. Encourage them to describe their drawings 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 the drawings.

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the “Practice Telling Personal Stories Orally” activity. Write simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to talk about their drawings or illustrations. For example:

This is a picture of ______.
It shows me ______.
I felt ______.

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: illustration/la ilustración; memorable/memorable; narrative/la narración; personal/personal.