Create a Strong Personal Narrative Lead

1. Focus

Explain Strong Leads

Say: The lead, or opening sentences, of our personal narratives are very important. A strong lead can grab our readers’ attention and make them want to keep going, but a weak lead can make readers lose interest right away. Good writers have many ways to grab their readers’ interest. Today we’re going to think about how to write a strong lead to start a personal narrative.

Model Strong Leads

Display the two sample leads below on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Why is it strong?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I was ten years old, my baseball team came from behind to win the league championship!</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The writer uses a strong voice that engages readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you’ve ever played on a team, then you can imagine how I felt when my team won the league championship in 2007.</td>
<td>Emotional Appeal</td>
<td>The writer speaks directly to readers and appeals to their sympathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack! The pitcher threw the first pitch and already the Raptors had a hit.</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>The writer grabs readers by describing a sound and getting right into the action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Are you guys ready for this?” I asked as we stood in the dugout and watched the Raptors take the field for the first inning.</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>The writer uses dialogue to get readers into the action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to hear about the best baseball game ever played?</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>This writer speaks directly to readers and appeals to their curiosity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All season, I’d believed no team was better than mine, and finally the night came for us to prove it—as you’ll soon see.</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>This writer expresses an opinion to set up the narrative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strong Personal Narrative Leads (BLM 6)

Say: Listen as I read these two personal narrative leads:

1. A few years ago, my baseball team played in the league semifinal against the Mountain Cats.

2. A chilly wind blew through Bicentennial Park on that Saturday night in October 2007. My baseball team, the Raptors, was playing the Mountain Cats in the league semifinal.

Sample Leads
Ask: Which lead grabbed your attention the most and how did the writer grab you? (Allow responses.) If necessary, read aloud the sentences again.

Say: When I read the first lead, I feel as if the author is just reporting some information to me. But when I read the second lead, I can almost imagine myself at the stadium. I can feel the chilly October air on my face. I can visualize the two opposing teams in their uniforms. I feel like something dramatic is going to happen. I definitely want to read this narrative. This is one good example of a strong lead. Let’s look at some others, too.

Distribute BLM 6 or display it using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read each lead with students. Say: Personal narrative writers can use many kinds of leads to hook their readers. Let’s read these together and think about what exactly makes each lead strong.

2. Rehearse

Practice Writing a Strong Lead

Invite students to work in small groups to compose their own strong lead based on “The Catch.” Groups should select one type of lead to focus on.

Share and Discuss Strong Leads

Bring groups together and invite them to read aloud the leads they wrote. Invite the rest of the class to identify what type of lead the group has written and to comment on how strong it is. Use these examples to reinforce the characteristics of a strong lead.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned how to write many types of strong leads for our personal narratives. As you draft your personal narrative, think about how you can begin it in a way that will grab your readers and make them want to keep going.

Encourage students to focus on their lead when they draft during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite 2 or 3 students who have strong personal narrative leads to read them aloud to the class. Discuss the approach each student took.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to draw the opening of their personal narrative and to tell you about their lead in whatever language they can. Then encourage them to translate this spoken language into writing. If necessary, invite them to use a sentence that begins with the pronoun I. Reinforce the idea that personal narratives are told in the first person.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide simple sentence frames to help students practice different kinds of leads. For example:

When I was [age] I ______.
Would you like to hear about _____?
I said, “______.”