Use the First Person Narrative Voice

1. Focus

Explain First Person Narrative Voice

Say: When we write stories, we need to decide what voice, or point of view, to use. When we want readers to learn about events and see things from one character’s perspective only, then we use the first person point of view. In the first person point of view, readers see everything through the eyes of the narrator. Today we’re going to look at examples of the first person narrative voice and think about why we might want to use the first person to tell our own realistic fiction stories.

Model First Person Narrative Voice

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud both examples and then go back and reread each one as you discuss it.

Modeling Text

Say: Both examples tell the story from the point of view of one of the characters, who happens to be Cai. I can tell this because both examples have Cai telling the story using the pronoun I. But the two examples are very different. One uses first person voice effectively and the other doesn’t.

After example 1. Say: When I read this example of first person writing, I don’t feel as if the voice has any personality. I don’t feel as if I’m listening to a real boy speaking. Do you? The writer uses the first person correctly, but she doesn’t really capture the inner voice, thoughts, and feelings of the character Cai. There’s more to using first person than just using the pronouns correctly.

After example 2. Say: This example tells about the same event, but now I can hear Cai talking. I can hear his voice. As a reader, I feel very close to the action, since I am following right along with a character in the story. I can see the kids lining up and marching along to the cave with a purpose. I can picture Cai’s worry about his dog as he keeps calling, “Tucker.” I know this is first person because Cai is telling it from his point of view. He uses the pronouns I and we to talk about himself and the kids. But this example is more than just using first person correctly. This example captures the voice of a real boy. When you use
first person, make sure that your character, who is telling the story, sounds true to life. Make sure that what your character says is easy for readers to visualize.

2. Rehearse

Practice Using the First Person Narrative Voice

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

The principal called out my name. The whole class was looking at me.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with a partner to add sentences to the practice text that continue the use of first person and add the voice of a student. Point out that although we know this is written in first person because we recognize the pronouns my and me, we don’t really hear the voice of the student talking in this situation. Student pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. Ask students to explain how their sentences show that the narrator is a main character in the story.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite pairs to read aloud their sentences. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own realistic fiction stories. Use some or all of the following questions to encourage discussion of the first person point of view:

- What did you do to develop your narrator’s voice and personality?
- What do you like about writing in the first person? What don’t you like?
- Do you think you might want to use the first person point of view for your story? Why or why not?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We have learned that fiction writers use the first person point of view when they want to tell a story through the eyes of one character. In a first person story, readers only see and hear and feel and learn what the narrator tells them. When you use a first person voice, make your narrator as believable as possible. Give him or her a voice, a personality.

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 their understanding of narrative voice and why an author would choose to use the first person narrative voice to tell a story.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While other students work with partners or during independent writing time, work one on one with beginning ELs. Model generating oral sentences about yourself using the sentence frame I ______. Write your sentences on chart paper. Invite students to read them with you. Then ask students to generate additional sentences of their own using the same sentence frame to talk about themselves using the first person.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to generate and write down sentences using the sentence frame I ______.

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.