Use the Third Person Narrative Voice

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn that writers use a third person narrative voice when they don’t want to tell what happens from just one character’s point of view.
• Practice using third person narrative voice in sentences.
• Discuss how to apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling and practice texts on chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Using Third Person Narrative Voice in a Story

Say: When I write a realistic fiction story, I must pick a narrative voice for my story. Sometimes I pick a character in the story to tell what happens. When I do this, I am using the first person point of view. A first person narrator takes part in the action of the story, so he or she brings my readers close to the action of the story. But a first person narrator can also limit what I’m able to tell in the story. I can only describe things that the narrator sees or feels. I use a third person narrative voice when I want to tell the story from the outside, as if I am watching all of the characters and the scenes. Today I’m going to read excerpts from a realistic fiction story with a third person narrator. I’m going to discuss the features of a third person narrative voice and why you might want to use a third person narrator to tell your own realistic fiction story.

Model Using Third Person Narrative Voice in a Story

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen as you read the passage aloud and to think about the relationship of the third person narrator to the action of the story.

Modeling Text

In one corner of the unlit basement, two eyes glowed red. In the dark, the kids could make out a shadowy creature almost as large as the washing machine. It was growling.

“What is that?” cried Brooke.

“An alien!” said Jalissa.

“The bogeyman!” said Tia.


“It’s a dog,” Jamal said, and he turned on the light.

Say: The narrator refers to the characters as the kids and uses the kids’ first names to tell about them. She also uses the pronoun he to talk about Jamal when he turns on the light. This tells me that the writer is using the third person point of view. By using third person, the writer can be outside the story, watching what the kids do. She can tell about the thoughts and feelings of all the kids. If she were telling the story in first person, she would only be able to tell the thoughts and feelings of one of the characters. When she describes what the kids see in the dark, she uses her words to show what the kids see. The way she chooses to tell how the kids respond lets her readers visualize how each of the kids is feeling.
2. Rehearse

**Practice Using Third Person Narrative Voice**

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

**Practice Text**

Ryan climbed to the second branch. His friends were quiet. No one spoke until his hands were around the kitten.

Ask students to work with a partner to add sentences to the practice text that continue the use of third person. Remind students that the third person narrator can get inside each character’s head and know what he or she is feeling and thinking. Point out that although we know the practice text is written in third person—because we recognize the pronoun his and the narrator’s use of Ryan’s first name to refer to him—we don’t really hear the voice of narrator. Student pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. Students will need to explain how their sentences show that the narrator is outside the story sharing the thoughts and feelings of all the characters.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite pairs to read aloud their sentences and explain the effect of using a third person narrator. Use opportunities in students’ examples to demonstrate aspects of the third person point of view. Encourage discussion with some or all of the questions below:

- **What did you find most challenging about using the third person?**
- **What strategies did you use to tell your characters’ thoughts and feelings?**
- **Would you want to write your story in the third person? Why or why not?**

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned that writers use the third person narrative voice in their stories when they want to include the thoughts and feelings of all the characters. As you write your realistic fiction story, ask yourself, “Do I want one character to tell the story, or do I want to include the thoughts and feelings of many characters?”

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 how they have used their understanding of narrative voice to choose whether to tell their stories in first or third person.

**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 someone else using the sentence frames He _____, She _____, and/or They ____. Record 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 frames to talk about others using the third person.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to generate and write down sentences using the sentence frames:

He ____. She ____. They ____. 

**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.