Look Through a Writer’s Eyes

1. Focus

Introduce Personal Narrative Writing

Display a photograph or souvenir that you associate with an experience you had during a trip you took. Use the sample think-aloud below as a model of how to talk to students about the memory evoked by your photograph or souvenir. You may wish to share more than one example with students.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I want to tell you about an experience I had when I took a trip as a child. I was reminded of this experience when I found these ski goggles the other day. I was ten years old when I went skiing with my family in Vail, Colorado. I had never skied before, and I was very excited to try. But when faced with sliding down a mountainside on two thin planks, I couldn’t do it. I was too scared. I spent three days sulking and alone as my family enjoyed themselves on the slopes. Finally, my big brother convinced me to try the littlest hill with him. I was terrified, but I was so bored and miserable, I decided to try it. My brother slipped these goggles on my head and then patiently showed me how to ski down the baby slope. When I reached the bottom, I was so happy! It wasn’t so scary, after all. By the end of the day, I was skiing down the medium slopes and having a ball! That day, I learned to not let my fear keep me from trying new things.

Explain: The experience I just shared is a personal story from a trip I took. Trips are a great source of memories of personal stories. Many of those personal stories tell about how we became the people we are. You may think you need to have traveled far and wide in order to have a personal story about a trip worth sharing, but that’s simply not true. Even when you cross the street to visit your best friend, you may experience something important. When we write our personal stories, they are called personal narratives. For the next several weeks, we are going to read, write, and share our personal narratives.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, teachers will:

• Launch the personal narratives unit of study.
• Establish themselves as a personal narratives writing mentor by sharing a story about a memorable trip.
• Model how writers use life experiences to generate ideas.

Students will:

• Use photographs and souvenirs to make connections to their past experiences during a trip.
• Share memories of a trip with a partner and discuss the process with the whole class.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Photographs and/or souvenirs of a trip
• Self-stick notes
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

During the model portion of this lesson, use one or more photographs and/or souvenirs from a trip you took to model making connections to your personal stories.

During the practice portion, students will need at least one photograph or souvenir with which to make their own connections. If students have not traveled, they may bring in any photo or object that reminds them of a place that’s important to them.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Personal Narratives

Say: We write a personal narrative to share an experience that has taught us something or changed us somehow. I usually write a personal narrative because I want to share an important experience with people whom I think will benefit from it or people who need to get to know me better. For example, I included my personal narrative about my trip to Vail on my job application to become a teacher because it shows what I know about the fear that many children have when facing something they don’t know how to do. Our personal narratives can be useful, informative, and entertaining.
2. Rehearse

Practice Telling Personal Stories Orally

Invite students to work with a partner. Both partners should share a photograph or souvenir from a trip they took and tell the personal story they associate with it. The partner listening to the personal story should be prepared to retell it to the class. Students should explain how the photograph or souvenir helped them remember details to tell their partner.

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 how their partners used their photograph or souvenir as a trigger for memories. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in a discussion about the exercise:

Storyteller
• What was it like to share your personal story? How did you feel as you told the story?
• Why is the experience you told about important?
• How might your readers benefit from knowing about your experience?

Listener
• How did you feel as you listened to your partner tell the story?
• What questions did you have while you listened?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Personal narratives are stories about events in our lives that we want to share with others. We learned that trips are a good topic for personal narratives. In the next several weeks, we will look at more photographs and souvenirs to help us remember experiences to write about.

During independent writing time, invite students to draw and write about a trip they have taken (or another event of their choosing).

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud the event they wrote about.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners to “Practice Telling Personal Stories Orally.” Help them identify where their photograph was taken or where they got their souvenir by using a map and a stickpin. Use self-stick notes to label the images in their photographs.

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner practice. Display simple sentence frames using the interactive whiteboard resources or on chart paper and model how students can use them to talk about their photograph or souvenir. For example:

This ______ reminds me ______.
This photo shows ______.
It is important to me because ______.

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: experience/la experiencia; informative/informativo(a); memory/la memoria; narrative/la narración.

Use the images provided on the interactive whiteboard resources as additional visual prompts for telling personal stories.